

**THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION  
(1974 to 1984)**

**SUBMITTED BY  
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## ABSTRACT

The thesis is concerned with the Ethiopian revolution between 1974, when an urban popular uprising broke out, and 1984, when the new regime established the Workers Party of Ethiopia.

Chapter 1 discusses the background to the revolution and introduces the factors that became important in the causes and outcomes of the revolution.

Part one (Chapters 2 and 3) is concerned with the collapse of the old-state in 1974. Chapter 2 deals with the urban popular uprising of early 1974 which followed in the wake of the structural crisis. Chapter 3 deals with the capture of power by a group of junior officers and privates (the Derg) claiming to represent the security forces.

1974 to 1977 discusses under part two (chapters 4 6) can be taken as the formative years of the post-revolutionary order. Chapter 4 discusses the new regime's 1975 social and economic reforms; chapter 5 the emergence of the political organizations and the regime's 1976 conversion from "African socialism" to "scientific socialism"; and, Chapter 6 the autocratization under Mengistu Haile-Mariam of what had until 1977 been a collective exercise of power by a group of junior officers, in the name of the Derg.

Part three (Chapters 7 and 8) is concerned with the consolidation of power by the new autocracy. Chapter 7 describes its victories over urban dissension led by one of the leftist civilian organizations (EPRP) and over international and domestic counter-revolutionary forces as well as Ethiopia's shift of alliances from the west to the east. Chapter 8 deals with the elimination of all existing political organizations and with the establishment of the Workers Party of Ethiopia.

Chapter 9 gives a summary of the whole work and attempts to examine the episode under consideration from the perspective of contemporary social science research.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ALF	The Afar Liberation Front
AELU	The All Ethiopian Labour Movement
AESM	The All Ethiopian Socialist Movement
CC	The Central Committee
COPWE	The Commission for the Organization of the Workers Party of Ethiopia
CELU	The Confederation of the Ethiopian Labour Unions
CCAFPTA	The Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, the Police and Territorial Army
ELF	The Eritrean Liberation Front
EPLF	The Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EDU	The Ethiopian Democratic Union
EMLRO	The Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization
EOPRS	The Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
ESUE	The Ethiopian Students' Union of Europe
ESUNE	The Ethiopian Students' Union of Europe
JFEMLO	The Joint Front of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations
NDRPE	The National Democratic Revolutionary Programme of Ethiopia
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
OLF	The Oromo Liberation Front
PA	Peasants' Association
PAE	The Peasants' Association of Ethiopia
PDRE	The People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
PMAC	The Provisional Military Administrative Council
POMOA	The Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs
TLF	The Tigre Liberation Front
TPLF	The Tigre People Liberation Front
REWA	The Revolutionary Ethiopian Woman Association
REYA	The Revolutionary Ethiopian Youth Association
USUAA	The University Students Union of Addis Ababa
UDA	Urban Dwellers' Association
WSLF	The Western Somali Liberation Front
WPE	The Workers' Party of Ethiopia

## INTRODUCTION

In the first half of 1974 the Ethiopian urban centres were engulfed by a spontaneous uprising. In September, this led to the overthrow of the absolutist monarchy and the seizure of power by a collective body of junior officers, NCO's and privates called the Derg. In 1975 and 1976, the new regime adopted a series of socio-economic and political reforms and implemented them vigorously. However, the question of who was to have power proved difficult to resolve; rather, it became a source of conflict within and outside the Derg. Consequently, the Derg underwent an internal transformation which led to the emergence of an autocracy in February 1977. In 1984, the new regime had emerged as a party state after having mobilized, organized and armed the urban and rural populations, liquidated all other political organizations which aspired to monopolize or have a share in power and established a Leninist vanguard party. These were the main component parts of the transformation which took place between 1974 and 1984 and it is with them that the present research is primarily concerned.

Three trends are reflected in the literature published by the Ethiopian political organizations on the components of the transformations. The first of these is that part written by partisans of some of the political organizations who, because of their ideological persuasions, were opposed to the "socialist" orientation of the transformations. Examples are the papers of the rightwing pan-Ethiopian and regional political organizations. This literature is aimed not at an explanation of the transformations that have taken place but at mobilizing public opinion against the new regime. Further, it mainly dwells, for obvious reasons, on one of the component parts of the transformations, namely, the new regime and its "atrocities" and condemns it as "Fascist". Despite that, a brief discussion of EDU's

programme and papers has been included in Chapter 5 because, it is believed, doing so will throw light on the course of the struggle between the various organized groups.<sup>1</sup>

A second body of literature which concurs with the first was produced by partisans of EPRP and the radical regionalist organizations. The central thesis of the rhetoric of these allegedly Marxist-Leninist organizations is that the new regime is not socialist because it has not pursued Marxist-Leninist policies; rather, it is "fascist" or "neo-colonialist". This literature is also motivated by the determination to discredit the new regime rather than give an objective account or evaluation of the transformations.

A third body of literature is that which is also supposedly Marxist-Leninist but which takes the opposite position from the above two. This consists of the public pronouncements, newspapers, articles and papers of the new regime and the political organizations like AESM which were working in collaboration with it until they split with each other between 1977-1979. This part of the literature is extremely sweeping in its condemnation of the old order and full of praise for the new order. It aims at rallying public support behind the "revolutionary transformations". As reflected in the debate between EPRP and AESM, the central issue between the two bodies of Marxist-Leninist literature was whether the transformations were socialist or not.<sup>2</sup>

It can be said that the literature produced by individuals falls within one or other of these three trends. Again, the bulk of this is interested in influencing the direction of the change rather than explaining it. Examples of works that come under the anti-socialist body of literature are the so-called "instant histories". There were a number of thin books such as that by B. Thomson<sup>3</sup> which were published within the first several years of the outbreak of the revolt. Those focussed on the excesses of the new regime and

condemned everything that had anything to do with the change as an aberration. An example of the exposition of the second type of literature is that of Michael Warr who argues that the Ethiopian revolution is "betrayed" by the military regime which is "bonapartist" bent on consummating not a socialist but a state capitalist revolution.<sup>4</sup> A glaring example of a book that comes under the third type of literature is that written by a Central Committee member of the Cuban Communist Party (Valdes Vivo) who was most unsparing in his condemnations of the old-state and in his eulogy for the transformations and for Mengistu in person. For him, the changes that had taken place in Ethiopia amounted to a true "socialist" revolution.<sup>5</sup>

There are a different class of authors whose books on the Ethiopian revolution are worthy of the reader's attention since they are objective and informative. However, these works suffer from one shortcoming: they lack firm grounding in general theoretical works. Two representative authors in this area are Rene Lefort<sup>6</sup> and Marina and David Ottaway.<sup>7</sup>

By contrast, there are authors who have produced books which rank as proper exercises within the discipline of the sociology of revolution. They are interested more in the project of explaining the causes and outcomes of the Ethiopian revolution rather than in reflecting their prejudices or in influencing the course of the transformations. Moreover, they cite works on general theories of revolutions in order to validate their findings. In this regard, three authors, who represent three trends within the general debate on the Ethiopian revolution, stand out as being most relevant.

The first is Christopher Clapham who acknowledges that transformations have taken place in Ethiopia to warrant the conclusion that a revolution has occurred but, sharing the scepticism of deTocqueville, argues that there is very little that revolutions can change from the past.<sup>8</sup> The second is John Markakis whose views are,

perhaps, coloured by his sympathy for one of the leftist groups of Ethiopia. Nevertheless, following Marxist methodology, he argues coherently that, despite the transformations, what is achieved in Ethiopia is neither a middle class revolution since there was no indigenous middle-class to talk of nor a socialist revolution since the army has usurped the power from the true revolutionaries and imposed its rule without any form of legitimacy. He describes the new political order as "garrison socialism", not different from some of the other military dictatorships in Africa.<sup>9</sup> The third are Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux who, following especially Trimberger's concept of "revolution from above", accept that a radical social revolution has been achieved in Ethiopia but that the possibility of a reversal will continue to persist until a real distribution of social and political power takes place.<sup>10</sup> In Chapter 9, an attempt is made to react to these and to some of the more general theoretical works on revolutions; suffice it here to indicate some of the similarities and differences in approach between them and the present study.

One of the attractions of socialism to the Ethiopian left starting from the 1960's was their conviction that once it was adopted as the official ideology, it would put an end to local nationalism and give birth to a new and united Ethiopia. It was argued that some regions sought to break away from the country because their inhabitants were opposed to the exploitative nature of the regime and that, once a socialist order was in place, the need for the struggle to secede would cease to exist. In the course of the revolution, however, instead of being a solution to the problems of local nationalism, the understanding of the correct path to socialism itself became a source of conflict and bloodshed among the contending leftist political organizations.

Further, the great bulk of the literature produced at home and abroad was dominated by the question of

whether the revolution was socialist or not. The issue is an article of faith to those who have already taken a position on it and, in any case, the question is unsettled among veterans of the Communist movement such as those of the Soviet Union. Consequently, an attempt is made here to document the arguments on both sides and to comment on the applicability or otherwise of the Marxist methodology on certain questions in the hope that this will throw light on the ideology of the new regime.<sup>11</sup> Beyond that, however, the present study, unlike that of Markakis, refuses to become embroiled in the debate, or to attempt to resolve the issue, because it is believed that it does not have much explanatory value.

Instead, an effort is made to give an objective account of the revolutionary transformations that have taken place in Ethiopia between 1974 and 1984. However, objectivity is not absolute. There are grey areas which are genuinely difficult to classify as coming within the orbit of the subjective or of the objective. Moreover, there is the question of the diversity of experiences and interests which can always colour one's judgement. One problem area in this regard is the role of individuals or rulers like Haile Sellassie or Mengistu in revolutionary transformations. These are often deliberately distorted or unwittingly exaggerated or undermined. The world of pure objectivity must remain an ideal which we all aspire to attain; in the meantime, one can only hope to do the best one can.

Moreover, the present study seeks to render a comprehensive account of the component parts of the revolutionary transformations. Chapter 1 introduces the complex and relevant factors that became important in the causes and outcomes of the revolution. Thus introduced are: the international dynamic, the emergence of Ethiopia as a sovereign state, the old-state and the contradictions within it, and the social structures that were relevant to the course of the revolution. The

following parts and chapters take up individual themes and attempt to give an "objective" account of how they developed. Part one describes the collapse of the old-state; part two critically examines the early socio-economic and political transformations that determined the direction of the revolution; and, part three discusses the process of consolidation of power by the new regime. Chapter 9 summarizes the whole work and also examines the transformations from the perspectives of the existing literature on the Ethiopian revolution and the general theory on revolutions.

The present study also tries to give a narrative of the component parts of the transformations in a chronological order as far as possible. It is hoped that this will explain, better than existing works have done, the sequence of events and the important conjunctures in the course of the revolution. Though this has been the dominant approach (an approach which may be called "the historical method"), it has not been employed to the detriment of the comparative or thematic approaches as these have also been used where relevant. For example, the 1974 revolution has been compared with and contrasted to the abortive coup of 1960 and to other revolutions and the mobilization of the Ethiopian peasantry compared with and contrasted to that of other countries.<sup>12</sup> Also, themes like agrarian, political and organizational reforms have been developed in different chapters.

Further, the thesis relies heavily on primary sources written mostly in the national official language (Amharic). This includes official pronouncements, laws and newspapers of the new regimes as well as constitutions, programmes and publications of the various political organizations. It is hoped that this will enable the present study to capture the mood of the revolution more than previous works have done.

In addition, an attempt is made to view the transformations from the perspective of general theories on revolutions. Not one but several theories have been

used because it was felt that one theory was more suited to explaining a given component of the revolutionary transformation than another. Thus, Skocpol's notion of the convergence of a complex set of structures appears to offer better insight into the causes of revolutions than other works.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, Charles Tilly's idea of multiple sovereignty has been found appropriate to explain the emergence and outcome of the conflict between the various political organizations including the new regime.<sup>14</sup> Finally, Barrington Moore's acceptance, not of class exploitation, but of culture as an explanation for the actions of a social group has been found appropriate in explaining why the army led by junior officers, as opposed to the military-Civilian upper class or the intermediate elite, felt they could take power in Ethiopia and run the state and acted to do so.<sup>15</sup>

An attempt is also made to examine, in light of general theory, the sum of the component parts of the transformation as a whole. The method employed to do this is to go beyond explaining or documenting the transformations achieved and to evaluate them. In other words, it will be argued that change for the sake of change is not adequate to justify pegging the name "revolution" to an episode especially when the transformation achieved is found, by some acceptable standard, to be static or retrogressive. From the perspective of general theory, the question of whether evaluation is an appropriate scientific inquiry may be a contentious issue. Nevertheless, it is believed that general theories on revolutions are hardly ever cumulative but rather "islands of theories" co-existing with each other. Consequently, a humble work such as this cannot aim at reconciling the various theories and evolve an appropriate overarching theory to explain or evaluate the Ethiopian revolution. Under the circumstances, the best that can be done is find the most illuminating theory and applying it to the Ethiopian episode.

On the whole, the tendency of the existing literature is to accept that a revolution has been achieved so long as a degree of transformation has taken place. Clapham in fact goes further and warns against adopting a criterion other than transformation in deciding whether a revolution has taken place or not.<sup>16</sup> As already noted, Markakis, on the other hand, makes the attainment of "true socialism" a requisite for revolutions.<sup>17</sup> Halliday and Molyneux appear to suggest that an effective and permanent distribution of social and political power is a requisite for an irreversible socialist revolutionary transformation.<sup>18</sup> To Skocpol, transformations in social and political structures are sufficient to warrant the dubbing of an episode a "revolution".<sup>19</sup>

To Marx, on the other hand, revolutions are necessarily progressive; they bring about qualitative changes in the mode of production. For reasons that will be explained in Chapter 9,<sup>20</sup> the present research finds this Marxist conception of the revolution illuminating. Thus, each of the chapters below will be critical in examining the reforms from the point of view of the benefits they have or are likely to achieve for the people. Criteria like organizations to the people have been woven into the relevant chapters as standards for the evaluation of whether the new order is any better than the past. However, like the works of Marx, the present study places much more emphasis on the economic criterion (on the question of whether the new order is more dynamic in terms of productivity) since the other criteria normally break down during revolutionary upheavals. The economic reforms are discussed especially in chapters 4 and 9.<sup>21</sup> Arguably, despite the reality of radical transformations, the adoption of such criteria used to evaluate them casts doubt on whether it is appropriate to talk highly of such a revolution or whether a revolution has in fact been achieved at all.

#### FOOTNOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. Chapter 5, pp. 172-182 concerning EDU.
2. Chapter 5, pp. 191-201 concerning the EPRP-AESM debate.
3. Two examples of what have been referred to as "instant history" are: Thomson, B., Ethiopia: The Country That Cut Off Its Head: a Diary of the Revolution, Robson Books, London, 1975. Legum, C., Ethiopia: The Fall of Haile Selassie's Empire, London, 1975.
4. Warr, M., "There's a Revolution in Ethiopia", Horn of Africa, Vol. 2, No. 3, July-September 1979.
5. Vivo, V.R., Ethiopia's Revolution, International Publishers, New York, 1978, pp. 41 ff.
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8. Clapham, C., Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. 13.
9. Markakis, J., "Garrison Socialism in Ethiopia", MERIP Reports, No. 79, July 1979.
10. Halliday, F. and Molyneux, M., The Ethiopian Revolution, Verso Editions and NLB, London, 1981, pp. 25-31 and 37-38.
11. Chapter 9, pp. 350 ff, below.
12. Chapter 9, pp. 363 ff, below; and pp. 372 ff, below.
13. Skocpol, T., States and Social Revolutions: a Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, pp. 14 ff.

14. Tilly, C., From Mobilization to Revolution, Random House, New York, 1978, Chapter 7.
15. Moore, B., Injustice: the Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt, White Plains, New York, 1978.
16. See note 8 above, pp. 16 and 17.
17. See note 9 above.
18. See note 10 above.
19. See note 13 above, p. 4.
20. Chapter 9, pp. 373 ff, below.
21. Chapters 4, and Chapter 9, pp. 377 ff, below.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE EMERGENCE OF THE STRUCTURAL CRISIS

#### (A) THE EMERGENCE OF ETHIOPIA AS A SOVEREIGN STATE

The region now called Ethiopia has been the home of diverse linguistic groups since time immemorial. These were the Semitic languages of the northern and central highlands, notably Amharic and Tigrean, the Cushitic languages of the lowlands and of the south-western, central and south-eastern highlands, notably Oromo, Afar and Somali; the Sidama languages of the central and southern highlands; and, the Nilotic languages of the periphery areas along the Sudanese frontier. It has been the orthodoxy among "Ethiopianists" to assert that, whereas the other groups have lived in the region since time immemorial, the Semitic languages and people were a result of intermarriages and cultural exchanges between the Cushitic peoples of northern Ethiopia, and settlers from the Arabian Peninsula which took place only in the first millenium B.C. . However, the idea is not without challenge; Grover Hudson for one has argued that all the Afro-Asiatic languages have in fact originated from the Ethiopian region<sup>1</sup>. If correct, this would render Ethiopia the source of the Semitic, Cushitic and Sidama languages and their counterparts in the present neighbouring countries of Africa and the Middle East as well as many other languages in north, central and West Africa, like the Berber and Chadic languages. clearly the origin of the Ethiopian linguistic groups is still a matter of conjecture.

The Ethiopian region was also an early home for the great monotheistic religions of the Middle East. Though Judaism was perhaps the first to be introduced into the region (probably before Christ), it was Christianity

(fourth century AD) and Islam (seventh century AD) which were superimposed on the linguistically diverse, Judaic and animist populations of the region and became the major contending ideologies from that time to the present.

In addition, the Ethiopian region has been the home of diverse political institutions for at least the last 2000 years. During that period, the major protagonist has been the Christian kingdom which had to change its seat several times in the northern and central highlands. The first of these was the classical Kingdom of Axum (first millenium AD) which had as its heart-land the present regions of the Tigrean and Eritrean plateau and the adjoining coastal area of the Red Sea. The kingdom was notable for its architecture, having a written culture and maintaining a flourishing trade not only with the interior but also the Middle East and Far East. At the height of its glory as of the middle of the millenium, it was in control of a large area extending into the Arabian Peninsula across the Red Sea, the present day Sudan, and also dominated most of the trading posts on the southern coast of the Red Sea as far as present day Somalia. Axum's rise to a land and sea power earned it the designation "empire". However, the rise and expansion of Islam in the 7th century AD, and the waves of migrations of the Beja's from the north, cut the empire's relations with the other centres of the classical civilizations and, by the end of the millenium, put an end to Axum altogether<sup>2</sup>.

In the 12th and 13th centuries, the medieval kingdoms of Ethiopia emerged in the Agaw (Cushitic) and Amhara regions of the central highlands with the religious ideology and script of Axum<sup>3</sup>. In addition to making an impressive array of conquests in all directions including the present Eritrean region in the North, they built monasteries and produced literature, music and art. The political career of the more important of the kingdoms which was ruled by the so called Solomonic

dynasty and which had emerged among the Amhara in the 13th century, was marked by having to change its seat constantly in order to tame independent - minded regional governors and to ward off increasingly important Islamic encroachments from the strings of emirates that had come to exist in the eastern highland and lowland areas during the 12th century<sup>4</sup>.

The decline of this kingdom came in the 16th century as a result of invasions by one of these emirates (Harar) and by waves of Oromo migrations from the south. Harar, led by Gagn who was probably a Somali, overran the length and breadth of the central and northern highlands from 1529 to 1543. If, in this enterprise, Harar was backed by the Ottoman Empire, which was by then beginning to make its influence in the region felt, the Christian kingdom was rescued from total annihilation by Portuguese musketeers made available courtesy of their government. Despite the failure of the conquest, it appears to have resulted in the further penetration of Islam among the highland populations. Harar's defeat was followed by 50 years of waves of migrations by the animist Oromo into the eastern, western, central and northern highlands. Subsequently, the Oromo settled in the territories which they conquered and adopted either Christianity or Islam depending on the religion of the people among whom they settled<sup>5</sup>.

The greatly weakened Christian kingdom established its capital in the north-western part of the highlands (Gondar) in the second half of the 16th century; nevertheless, quite apart from the fact that it had not recovered from the previous invasions, it was further debilitated by religious disputes provoked by the intervention of Jesuit missionaries, by the centrifugal tendencies among the regional nobles, and by the restiveness of the royal garrisons. With the religious disputes out of the way, with an understanding struck between the nobility and the monarchy, and with the influence of the Ottoman empire having declined in the

region because of revolts against it in the Arabian Peninsula, the Christian kingdom was able to flourish once again at Gondar between the 1640's and the 1770's. From then to the 1850's, however, it disintegrated into feudal anarchy often referred to as "the era of the princes".<sup>6</sup>

These political actors can be described as an empire (Axum), a city-state (Harar), a kingdom (Janjero among the Sidama's), and as a clan (the Somali's). In other words, none of them were sovereign states with a claim to independence, equality, and territorial integrity, nor were they committed to non-interference in each others internal affairs, and the settlement of disputes peacefully. Rather, they felt free to trample on and pillage each others rights and properties, subdue one another and exact tribute. Similarly, the whole of the region that we now call "Ethiopia", composed as it was of all these political actors, did not enjoy the attributes of a sovereign state in its dealings with powers like the Greek or Ottoman empires. Its relations with such powers were governed by the same rules that prevailed among the actors within the Ethiopian region.

The process of Ethiopia's emergence as a sovereign state can be said to have been initiated and completed by its well known kings: Tewodros of Gondar (1855-1868), Yohannis of Tigre (1869-1889) and Menelik of the central province of Shoa (1889-1913). Calling himself king of "Ethiopia" like his predecessors and imbued with Ethiopian nationalism, Tewodros conducted a series of campaigns and managed to bring most of the northern highlands under his control, thus putting an end to the era of princes. Yohannis not only consolidated Tewodros's fragile reunification of the north but also extended his rule to the Red Sea coast by bringing under his control the naibs of the port towns of Massawa and Arkiko who, since the 16th century, had been switching their allegiances between the Ethiopian kings and the rulers of the Ottoman and Egyptian empires<sup>7</sup>. Thus ,

Egypt, which in the 19th century had replaced the Ottoman Empire as the regional power, was expelled from the area as recognized by the tripartite agreement of 1884 concluded between Yohannis, Egypt and Britain. While acknowledging the suzerainty of Yohannis, Menelik was in the meantime expanding to the south-west, south and south-east and in so doing bringing under his control territories like the Ogaden which had never been under the jurisdiction of the kingdoms of the north. When Yohannis died fighting the Dervishes on the present Ethio-Sudanese frontier in 1889, Menelik inherited his throne and became the uncontested ruler of the whole of present-day Ethiopia.

As the internal consolidation was underway, the regional Islamic expansionists were replaced by the European imperial powers. In fact, Menelik's southward thrust was in part instigated by his competing in the carving up of the Horn of Africa with European powers; he is reputed to have stated that he was not going to be an independent spectator to the division of the region among the Europeans. However, it soon transpired that European designs were not limited to competing with him over territories which were outside his jurisdiction but extended to the annexation of the whole of Ethiopia as built by Tewodros, Yohannis and himself. Thus, Italy which had a coaling post at Asab and which had been fighting with the forces of Yohannis in order to expand into the interior, took advantage of the confusion that ensued upon Yohannis' death and in 1890 carved out the whole of the coastal area and the tip of the northern highlands, christened it "Eritrea", and brought it under its control. Then, in 1896, Italy declared an all-out war on Ethiopia but was heavily defeated at the hands of Menelik at Adwa (Tigre), not far from what became the Ethio-Eritrean boundary. Why Menelik did not then pursue the Italians, drive them out of Eritrea and claim what was his by right (by the fact that he was a successor of

Yohannis) has since been a matter of intense speculation among Ethiopians.

Menelik's diplomatic genius (his ability to play one state against another) is often cited as a major reason for his strong stature in the eyes of the European powers. More important in this regard, was, perhaps, his Adwa victory; that event seems to have enhanced the standing of Menelik and his country in the international arena, frustrated the ambition of the European powers to colonize Ethiopia, and forced them to conclude boundary treaties with him. Thus, Ethiopia and France concluded a treaty concerning the Ethio-Djibouti boundary in 1897; Ethiopia and Britain concerning the Ethio-Sudanese boundary in 1902, the Ethio-Kenyan boundary in 1907, and Ethio-British Somaliland in 1908; and Ethiopia and Italy concerning the Ethio-Eritrean boundary in 1908. Though a similar treaty was concluded between Ethiopia and Italy concerning the Ethio-Italian Somaliland boundary in 1908, the instruments by which they were executed (oral agreements and exchanges of correspondence) have since proved illusory.

The recognition of her boundaries by the European states coupled with the fact that she had a government and a people effectively made Ethiopia a sovereign state. This was further enhanced by the recognition of her sovereignty over all her territories except Eritrea by a tripartite treaty of 1906 concluded between Britain, France and Italy and by her membership of the League of Nations in 1922. The emergence of Ethiopia as a sovereign state at the turn of the century was remarkably early; at the time, only the Latin American states, Japan and China had joined the European state system; a few other countries like Saudi Arabia and Yemen which were allowed to keep their independence, were, not unlike Ethiopia, targets of colonial ambitions of European powers.

Like the present third world countries and, perhaps, like non-nuclear states, the sovereignty of Ethiopia was

true only in the juridical sense of the term. In other words, Ethiopia lacked the resources with which she could assert such formal attributes of a state as equality, independence and territorial integrity against the European powers which continued to pose a threat against her until 1944. Thus, though there were earlier attempts at dividing her into British, French and Italian spheres of influence, the real threat to her independence came in 1936. Resentful of her humiliation at Adwa, fascist Italy launched its offensive against Ethiopia from its African possessions of Eritrea and Italian Somaliland; this time, Italy had the advantage of modern weapons like planes and poison gas with the help of which she tore into the Ethiopian forces and occupied the country. Land-locked and starved of European weapons by a French blockade of Djibouti, Ethiopia's patriots resorted to guerrilla resistance while Haile Selassie went to Europe in self-imposed exile and, from that vantage point, launched a diplomatic offensive against Italy.

With the outbreak of World War II in the European theatre and with Mussolini's joining the Axis, Italy was confronted by the Allied powers both at home and in her colonial possessions. In 1941 Britain, at the head of the Allied Forces, liberated Ethiopia and reinstated Haile Selassie. Britain followed this by imposing a number of restrictions on the Ethiopian government which amounted to reducing the country to the status of a British de facto protectorate. This gave rise to the fear in Addis Ababa that Britain intended to treat Ethiopia as an enemy-occupied territory, which would not have been altogether inconsistent with her recognition of Italy's occupation of Ethiopia by an Anglo-Italian treaty of 1938. As it happened, Britain did not pursue the restrictions she imposed on Ethiopia with much vigour; after some diplomatic wrangling and a degree of US pressure, the restrictions began to be relaxed as of 1942<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, Britain was insistent that the Somali inhabited regions of the Ogaden and Haud which she had brought under her control should be treated as enemy occupied territories, a fact Ethiopia was made to recognize by treaty in 1942. After a lot of protests on the part of Ethiopia, another Anglo-Ethiopian treaty was concluded in 1944. That treaty recognized Ethiopia's sovereignty over the Ogaden and Haud subject to their continued British administration, since Britain insisted that they were necessary for the prosecution of World War II. Despite this understanding, in 1945 Britain submitted the Ogaden and Haud for disposal by the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Great Powers. As the proposal was not greeted with favour, the British government went public and declared that the idea had been submitted to the council only because of its sympathy for the Somali People and that the proposal would be dropped as of then. However, the Ogaden was not returned to Ethiopia until 1948 and the Haud area until 1955, three years and ten years after the end of the war respectively<sup>9</sup>.

In 1941, Eritrea too came under British administration as enemy occupied territory. Britain sought (or it was accused of having sought) to expand its adjoining colony of the Sudan by hanging on to Eritrea. On its part, Italy, which had made its peace with the Allied Powers in 1943, sought the return of its ex-colony of Eritrea. Ethiopia sought "reunification" because of its need for access to the sea, its claim that the territory used to belong to it and because the peoples of Ethiopia shared the same historical, linguistic and religious heritage with the peoples of the territory. Some Eritreans supported the British, some the Italians and some the Ethiopian position, while others were in favour of outright independence. The question of the disposal of Eritrea was then entertained by the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Great Powers between 1945 and 1948. However, they could not agree on the question, not

least because of the onset of the Cold War which was beginning both to frustrate their attempts at a post-war settlement of European issues, and to spill over to extra-European questions like that of Eritrea. Finally, they agreed to submit the question to the General Assembly of the UN, which, after several years of deliberation, decided to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia as of 1952<sup>10</sup>.

#### (B) THE MODERNIZING AUTOCRACY

Medieval Ethiopia was very much an agrarian society composed of a mass of cultivating peasants and a surplus - appropriating upper class. The northern socio-economic order was introduced into the southern highlands during Menelik's conquests of the region in the last quarter of the 19th century and superimposed on the pre-existing agrarian system about which very little is known. Though important as animal rearing communities, the nomadic people's who inhabited the vast expanses of the arid and semi-arid lowlands along the Red Sea Coast and Somali frontier have not been absorbed into the northern socio-economic order.

Though there were important pockets of tenancy in the north, the bulk of the peasants had a title to their holdings called "wrist" which entitled the holders to use their land and pass them on to their heirs. Contrary to popular misconception, there is growing evidence to show that the "wrist" holders also had the right to sell their land though in reality they rarely exercised that right because they depended on their holdings for their livelihood and because if they sold their plots, they would lose the right to claim a share of the family "wrist" land. Since the land was owned by the cultivator, therefore, the major form of surplus appropriation in the north was tribute, known as "gult"(fief). By contrast, the major form of surplus appropriation in the south was rent collected by landlords from the peasants. This arose from the fact

that the conquerors of the south and their descendants, who were probably given tribute rights initially, managed to register the land and claim it in the form of ownership and reduce the cultivators to tenancy in the course of the 20th century. In addition to tribute and rent, the peasants of both northern and southern Ethiopia were subjected to corvee and to presenting gifts on special occasions<sup>11</sup>.

Further, the "wrist" holders paid a tenth of their produce by way of tax. In 1944 this was replaced by the payment of rates based on the size and quality of the land and in 1967 by a progressive income tax. Though the same obligations existed for the landlords of the south, there was apparently a wide practice of shifting their tax duties onto the tenants. Finally, the peasants of the north and south and, when possible, the nomads of the lowlands paid tax on livestock, salt and trade.

The upper class which lived off the surplus appropriations was composed of what could be called the gentry and the nobility. More often than not, the gentry were state functionaries who were responsible for local administration, justice and tax collection. In return for their services, the gentry was entitled to a share of the tax they collected and sometimes to a tribute; often, they would have their own land in which case they could also be beneficiaries of corvée and rent<sup>12</sup>.

Superimposed on the gentry were the nobility who were primarily a class of warriors. The monarch gave rights of tribute over certain lands to members of the nobility in exchange for a commitment to make available, in time of war, their "private" armies as well as soldiers spontaneously raised from among the gentry and peasants. In addition to the land tenure and tax systems, these "feudal institutions" of the north were introduced to the south by Menelik's conquest of the region towards the end of the 19th century, giving rise to a new class of gentry and nobility often referred to as the "neftegna".

A constant feature of the weakness of the medieval Ethiopian state was the fact that these regional nobles who were in charge of military and administrative functions tended to assert independence against the monarch. The monarch counterbalanced the influence of the nobility with whatever political skills and manoeuvrings he could master and with the many royal garrisons (chewa) which were commanded by his loyal ras's and asmache's<sup>13</sup>. Except for the period between the 1770's to the 1850's when the centrifugal forces prevailed, central rule continued to be the order ever since. Despite this inherent weakness in the state, strong monarchs of medieval Ethiopia were able to use these institutions to conquer vast territories and it was the same institutions that the monarch from Tewodros in the middle of the 19th century to Haile Selassie in the 20th century used to create present day Ethiopia, to defeat Italy at Adwa in 1896, and to fight and resist it during its occupation of the country from 1936 to 1941.

In the 20th century, the nobility was to find its position undermined on account of the demands of modernization set in motion by European expansionism. The major reason for this was the state's creation of a modern civilian and military bureaucracy and the increasing dependence on it rather than the traditional elite. No doubt, modern education plays a pivotal role in the building up of such a bureaucracy. The first modern school was established by Menelik in Addis Ababa (Menelik II School), a school that Haile Selassie himself attended as a boy. Graduates of the Menelik and Mission schools, as well as individuals hand-picked by the government were sent abroad for further education and returned in the early part of the century to constitute a class of radical advocates of reform in the social, economic and political fields<sup>14</sup>. Called "Japanizers" or "the young of Ethiopia", these precursors of the radical civilian elite of the 1960's and 1970's held government positions that required modern education, and backed

Haile Selassie in his drive to adopt progressive policies which were opposed by the traditional nobility. It appears very few of the <sup>militants</sup> survived the Italian occupation of the country and those that did seem to have fallen out with the monarch on matters of policy as well as the question of his sojourn to Britain during the occupation. After the war, however, the monarch devoted a great deal of attention to the building of schools and institutions of higher education; for a time, he appointed himself minister of education, visited every school at least once a year, gave one of his palaces to the university etc. The kind of education pursued was very elitist; partly as a result of this and partly because of the belated introduction and slow growth of educational institutions, by no means all children of school age were provided with access to schools. In 1970, the number of enrolled secondary school students was 70,000 while the equivalent figure for university students in 1974 was 6,000 with a further 2,000 attending universities in other countries. The civil service, which was the most important employer of the school and university graduates, was gradually yielding to modernization under their influence. By 1974, therefore, 20,000 school and 6,000 university graduates were working in the civil service. The bulk of the remaining civil servants, totalling about 100,000 in 1974<sup>15</sup> had primary school education and or church, education, the latter of which only enabled them to read and write the official language (Amharic).

More important to the decline of the state's dependence on the nobility was the creation of a modern army which had been begun in the 1920's when Haile Selassie was the most powerful man in the government as regent and heir to the throne (1916 to 1930) and pursued vigorously when he became king (1930 to 1974). The first to be established was the Royal Bodyguard in the 1920's, with the help of a Belgium military mission engaged for the purpose and with the training of officers in France. This was followed in 1934 by the establishment of the

Genet Military Academy of Holeta. After the Italian occupation, the British helped in organizing and financing the army (1941 to 1951) followed by the American and others thereafter. The royal Bodyguard was reconstituted with pre-occupation graduates of the Holeta Academy, the Police Abadina was established in the 1940's, the Harar Academy in 1957, and the Air Force and Navy were greatly expanded thereafter. The assistance of different countries was employed in the running of these establishments: Indians for the Harar Academy and the Bodyguard, Swedes for the Air Force, Norwegians for the Navy and the Israelis for the police commandoes and for other security units<sup>16</sup>.

The Holeta Academy recruited its intake from among non-commissioned officers who could read and write the national official language (Amharic) and who could do their basic arithmetic; however, in its two years of training it offered no academic subjects whatsoever. Whereas the Abadina Police College was no different from the Holeta Academy in this regard, the others including the Harar Academy, the Air Force and the Navy, recruited some of the best school graduates of the country and provided them with an academic background equivalent to three years of university education in addition to the usual military training in strategy, Law, and the like. By 1974, the army consisted of 45,000 men including four divisions of infantry, one tank battalion, one airborne infantry battalion, four armoured car squadrons, four artillery battalions, two engineer battalions, fifty medium tanks, twenty light tanks, forty armed personnel carriers, eighty-six armed cars, six helicopters, a 6,800 mobile emergency force, 1,200 frontier guards, a 3,200 commando force as well and 9,200 paramilitary territorials in active force<sup>17</sup>.

The civilian and military bureaucracy was extremely expensive to maintain in several respects. In the first place, quite apart from the costs involved in running modern institutions like colleges, academic institutions,

hospitals and the like, the amount paid to members of the new elite by way of salary was much more than the income of the direct producers of wealth (the peasants and workers). For example, whereas the pay of a university graduate was a minimum of 500 dollars per month and that of a school graduate half of that, the per capita income of the country was a mere 150 dollars a year. Secondly, there was the expectation of the members of the modern elite not only to be paid above the level of inflation but also to receive an ever increasing income in order to promote their prestige and standard of living. Thirdly, the need to import weapons created dependence of the state on other powers and on exportable goods; whatever, could not be paid for by the export of coffee, hides, oil seeds and other less important commodities, had to be made good by the generosity of external powers. In addition, economic development became, in its own right, the tenet and ideology of the new elite. In other words, the economy had to be made to generate more wealth to meet these demands and others which, politically, were arguably less important in the short run but in terms of the plight of the people in the long term were even more pressing.

The state was in a dilemma with regard to its agrarian strategy, if it can be said to have had one. There was very little it could do concerning the extensive lowlands which the nomads used for watering and grazing their herds, short of developing certain parts of it through the granting of concession agreements to foreign investors since they required capital-intensive projects beyond the means of the government. Foreign investors would probably not have been easily attracted for this purpose. The rrist lands of the north which were arguably equivalent to a system of freehold, were fairly divided up by the peasants but extremely subdivided and fragmented. The only possible land reform in these areas was either nationalization and/or collectivization; while the wisdom of such a

policy is questionable, the ancien regime was in any case not predisposed to these policies. The state, therefore, was reduced to providing fertilizers and insecticides made available by courtesy of the UN organizations during the 1960's. By contrast, the state could have acted on the land which was being cultivated through tenancy agreements between the farmers and landlords but, instead, it prevaricated on the question.

There were at least three trends discernible the late 1960's, which were not necessarily consistent. In the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration there was a proposal to place a ceiling on the amount of land an individual could own without paying excessive tax on it; this was obviously intended to result in a certain amount of redistribution of land in areas where there were concentrations of land holdings in individual hands. Conversely, in practice the opposite applied: the vigorous commercialisation of agriculture pursued in several areas of the country in the late 1960's made possible by international public capital, led to the eviction of thousands of tenants and poor farmers. However, there is no question that this policy actually led to unprecedented levels of productivity. Yet again, there was another draft legislation which was finally submitted to parliament intended to regulate tenant-landlord relations; if adopted, this might have put an end to eviction of tenants; however, it would also have acted against the laissez faire commercialisation policy of the state. Coffee which mostly grew in the south-west and which constituted by far the most important foreign exchange earner did not show a marked rise in productivity in the 1960's and 1970's. It was not a good match to the Middle East's oil. In effect, agriculture was, on the whole, neither in a position to provide the raw materials required by industry nor generate sufficient taxable surplus to meet the increasing requirements of the modernizing state<sup>18</sup>.

Arguably, the achievements in the industrial sector over the same period were more impressive than the agricultural sector. Though the government launched three successive five years plans starting in 1957, the policy pursued in relation to the growth of industry was also basically laissez faire and the plans were mere indicators of targets that it was hoped would be met by the private as well as public sectors. In fact, most of the big industries which were actually developed by multinationals (for instance the St. George beer Brewery, the Ethiopian Airlines, the Wenji Sugar Factory and the Melloti Beer Brewery) predate the five year plans. More important than these, at least in terms of creating employment, were the intermediate industries that were established mostly by resident Italians, Greeks and Armenians in the 1960's. The explanation for the sudden increase in the number of these industries which included garages, food processing plants, restaurants, pulp industries, as well as import-export businesses was most probably the adoption in 1964 of a liberal investment guarantee proclamation with generous provisions on the expatriation of capital. By and large, nationals were limited to the retail business. In the 1960's, manufacturing production expanded at an average annual rate of 11.1 percent with higher rates registered in the later part of the decade; the labour force grew from 28,340 in 1961 to 51,312 in 1971.<sup>19</sup> However, all this was an extremely modest step towards a capitalist transformation of the national economy; 51,312 manufacturers in a population of about 32 million is not only insignificant but had also come very late. The inadequacy of the rate of growth is perhaps best reflected by the fact that there was still a great deal of unemployment. By the end of the 1960's, school graduates were also beginning to be unemployed and the fear of unemployment for university graduates was on the horizon from the early 1960's.

Thus, the national economy did not live up to the expectations of the modern elite: it did not improve its standard of living, or provide adequate employment for its new members. Nor was the state able to afford modern weapons comparable to Middle eastern countries with which Ethiopia was in military competition. In fact, in the 1960's, it became unfashionable for this elite to complain about its immediate circumstances; instead, its rhetoric became preoccupied with the plight of the lower classes in addition to becoming engulfed by a great sense of economic nationalism. How was it that Ethiopia, which had the potential to feed the whole of Africa or the Middle East, and which had been independent for 3000 years was now, in the second half of the 20th century just as backward as other third world countries if not more so? This rhetorical question was echoed in all speeches and debates of the elite. It can be argued that this was the situation in most less developed countries. In the case of Ethiopia, however, it was easy for the new elite to find a scapegoat in the anachronistic aristocratic autocracy which was still intact but which was in the meantime being rendered obsolete by the forces of modernization which it had itself unleashed.

Though the nobility and gentry had lost their traditional military functions, they had survived the changes of modernization as an administrative and surplus appropriating class. In 1908, Menelik introduced the first ministerial form of government. A bi-product of this was the division of the country in the same year into 34 administrative regions based on ethnic distribution and geographical position. During the occupation, Italy revised this and divided the country, including Italian Somaliland, into only 5 regions on similar grounds as before. In 1942, Haile Selassie's government again restructured the administrative units into 12 provinces with three subordinate administrative layers<sup>20</sup>. With some changes, most notably the acquisition of the Eritrean province and the division of

Hararghe into two provinces, this last structure lasted until 1987. <sup>Almost</sup> All top administrative positions were retained by the nobility and gentry until 1974. Yet another preserve of the nobility continued to be the monarch's court and up to about 1960 the bulk of the ministerial positions.

The survival of the upper class up to the beginning of the last quarter of the 20th century was in the context of a modernizing autocracy. Prior to the Italian occupation, the nobility had still been very influential and, hence, even in a position to obstruct some of the progressive policies of Haile Selassie which he pursued as regent and king up to the time of Italian occupation. After the occupation, however, the traditional regional nobility were greatly weakened with the result that the nobility drawn from the central province of Shoa replaced the regional ones who had local power base and legitimacy. Thus, like the south, the north came under the tutelage of the Shoan aristocracy. The latter were none other than Menelik's courtiers, his warrior lords of the south (the apex of the neftegna) and their descendants. More specifically, this meant that the provincial governorships were given to members of the royal family (including in-laws and distant relations) and hand-picked Shoans chosen for their loyalty to the crown.

A result of the Shoanization of the state was one of the reasons both for the further weakening of the nobility as well as the weakening of the bond between the government and the people. As Clapham pointed out the concept "Amhara" is not an ethnic but a linguistic and psychological one; the Shoan aristocracy including the monarch like Haile Selassie were descendants various ethnic groups like the Oromo and Amhara<sup>21</sup>. The Amhara's of the north who do not accept Shoans as belonging to the same ethnic group as themselves, and who in fact believe that the Shoans usurped the throne which rightly belonged to them, found it insulting that the Shoan aristocracy

were preferred to their own nobility to rule them as provincial governors. The Tigrians, who shared the same sentiments as the Amhara of the north, had the additional burden of having to speak Amharic in order to be able to go to school and to be employed by the state. To the southerners, the ruling class had always been not only a speaker of a different language but also a usurper of their land. Finally, while the Muslims of the lowlands did not suffer any deprivation of land on account of the ruling class, there were the questions of language and religion which acted as a barrier between them and the rulers. This is not to raise the controversial question of whether the peoples of Ethiopia are sufficiently integrated to live in one state or not - a question that anthropologists enjoy delving into - but merely to point out that such differences as the above between the rulers and the ruled were, as will be noted in the next section, important in creating friction between them.

The decline of the influence of the nobility was marked by a corresponding ascent of the monarch to the heights of power. Article 4 of the Revised Constitution issued at the height of Haile Selassie's power (1955) stated: "By virtue of His Imperial Blood, as well as by the anointing which He has received, the person of the Emperor is sacred, His dignity is inviolable and His power indisputable. He is, consequently, entitled to all the honours due to him in accordance with tradition and the present Constitution." Both tradition and the Constitution were generous in according the monarch indisputable power. As noted earlier, the regional nobles had been at times in a position to challenge his authority in the past; more often than not, however, he was the fountain of all power and justice; at any rate, with the decline of the nobility in the 20th century, the monarch's powers became more "indisputable" than ever before. Moreover, the Constitution of 1955 granted him not only the power of veto over laws made by parliament but also the personal authority to promulgate the kind of

law that parliament was authorised to make<sup>22</sup>. In addition to his legislative prerogatives, the monarch enjoyed extensive powers in the judicial, executive and treaty - making areas. Thus, he could review court judgements, make any executive decisions and conclude treaties with foreign powers subject in a limited number of cases to ratification by parliament<sup>23</sup>.

The monarch had his court with the help of which he carried out these tasks. He had his royal seal with which he promulgated laws made by parliament as well as by himself. He had, in addition, a department called "chilot" with the help of which he revised any judicial matters that were submitted to him, including most notably, decisions made by the regular courts. Further, he had the Ministry of Pen with the help of which he made his decisions known to the subordinate government agencies including the council of ministers. Finally, there was the institution of the "Akabi Sihah" over which the monarch presided and gave audience to the high dignitaries of state who offered their views on matters for which they had been granted an appointment or on any other matters where the monarch sought their opinions; they bestowed their respects through ritualistic prostrations as they approached the throne by way of showing their continued subservience to the monarch. These age-old institutions which were housed in the palace were filled predominantly by the aristocracy. The monarch was the centre around whom state power revolved. He used his position to play one individual or faction against another. Though this was most operative among the king's courtiers, the provincial governors were also subject to it; this was enhanced by the fact that the provincial governors were encouraged to bring matters directly to the king rather than through the Ministry of Interior to which they were subordinate. The upper echelons of the bureaucracy were not saved from this medieval machination either. Relevant in this regard was the emergence of a highly educated class of technocrats

who began assuming the highest government positions, including the ministerial posts as of the early 1960's. The monarch also exploited the split or competition that existed within this group, a split between the descendants of the aristocracy who emerged victorious during the 1974 uprising and those of humbler origin led by Aklilou Habte-Wolde (prime minister between 1961 and 1974).

According to Clapham, this system of government could cope with small court factions but not with a wider set of political constituencies as were developing in Ethiopia at the time<sup>24</sup>. Further, it can be said that this excessive concentration of power in one man and the absolute accountability to him of the officials could but breed not only complete subservience of the officials to the monarch but also to the concomitant irrelevance of officials building a power base within the society they ruled: if power flows from the king alone, it can be derived only from him and not from the people. A further implication of this state of affairs was the tendency of such officials not to take responsible decision but pass the same to the king for his action. Moreover, all this can work well, or work after a fashion, when the monarch is young, strong and intelligent, attributes which Haile Selassie had amply demonstrated in his long years of effective control of the state. An outstanding example of this was his incisive cross-examination of his generals and civilian officials which he conducted through radio interviews from Asmara on his way back to reinstate his rule after three days of unrest in the country as a result of an abortive coup against him in December 1960. By 1974, however, he was too old to make a single coherent sentence. Further, another inherent weakness of the Ethiopian monarchy was the fact that despite its centuries of history it had not evolved effective rules of succession to the throne with the result that a number of contenders emerged at these junctures giving rise to a leadership crisis.

Speculation about who was going to succeed Haile Selassie was actually raging for a number of years prior to 1974.

Thus, by 1960, the process of modernization had far advanced and tilted the balance in favour of the new elite as against the old; for all intents and purposes, the age-old aristocracy which had, for centuries, been the backbone of the monarchy had lost its military and administrative functions to the new elite. Though the monarchy survived with all its anachronisms and inherent weaknesses and continued to preside over these social forces, it was, as of 1960, finding it increasingly difficult to make itself relevant to the new elite. Moreover, the changing international environment greatly contributed to the decline of the ancien regime. The next section will deal with these internal and external factors that led to the collapse of Haile Selassie's regime in 1974.

#### (C) THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL FACTORS IN THE DECLINE OF THE STATE

A state derives its strengths and weaknesses from internal and external sources. In this regard, two post-world war II developments on the international scene (the emergence of the bi-polar security system and the emergence of the Middle East into independent sovereign states) appear relevant sources of strength and weakness for the Ethiopian state. Internally, three centres of opposition to the ancien regime look worthy of note: the rebellion in the Ogaden and Bale, the rebellion in Eritrea and the emergence of opposition at the centre. Arguably, all three had their genesis in the events of 1960.

Starting from the early 1940's Ethiopia had been cultivating friendly relations with the US not least because it sought to oust British influence in the area; however, it was not until 1950 that concrete bargains were struck between the two countries. As early as 1948, Pentagon officials had expressed interest in maintaining

the old Italian communications installation near Asmara (Eritrea). Secondly, US officials were about the same time developing the strategy of organizing the countries at the southern flank of the Soviet Union, like Turkey, and Iran, into a military alliance under NATO to form a line of defence (the northern tier) against possible USSR southward expansion. Also, entertained by the Pentagon was an extension of this strategy, namely, the southern tier (a secondary line of defence to be composed of amenable Middle Eastern countries). Thirdly, the US had taken advantage of the temporary absence of the USSR from the UN and successfully moved the General Assembly of that organization to pass the Uniting for Peace Resolution which authorised member states to contribute military units for deployment in Korea against the "threat" of North Korean "expansion" to the south. The US was, therefore, eager for member states of the UN to commit certain of their military units to that end. In 1950, Ethiopian diplomats at the UN expressed Ethiopia's willingness to allow the US to keep the communications facilities should Eritrea be returned to Ethiopia, persuasively advocated the establishment of and Ethiopia's participation in the southern tier alliance, and promised to commit a unit of her Bodyguard to the war in Korea. Having come to an understanding on all points, the US and Ethiopia concluded two agreements: the first, in 1951 entitling Ethiopia to the Point Four economic aid programme, and the second, in 1952, entitling her to military aid under the Mutual Defence Assistance Act of 1949.

The United States preoccupation in all this was its fear of possible Soviet expansion. As the Marshall plan of 1947 had marked the onset of the cold war between the east and west, the Point Four Programmes and the Mutual Defence Assistance acts of 1949 marked its extension to the third world. Dubbed Kagnew after the name of the Ethiopian Bodyguard battalion sent to Korea, the communications installation was used by the US for

tracking space satellites, monitoring radio broadcasts from eastern Europe and the Middle East, relaying military and diplomatic communications, and for linking American telecommunication in Europe and the Far East<sup>25</sup>. By contrast, Ethiopia's primary interests were territorial consolidation, access to the sea, economic development, and countering the threat that was building up against her in the Middle East. As it happened, she benefited a great deal in these respects: Eritrea was federated to Ethiopia in 1952 by a decision of the UN General Assembly and, between 1952 and 1974, she received 270 million dollars worth of military aid and 350 million dollars worth of economic aid<sup>26</sup>. The amount of military aid provided is more than half the total of US military assistance given to all the African countries over the same period; based on such comparisons, observers of Ethiopian politics often express surprise at the extent of US support for Ethiopia. However, this overlooks one important fact: Ethiopia during that period was not so much in military competition with the African countries as with those of the Middle East.

In the wake of its emergence into independence, the Middle East was plunged into an ideological crisis perhaps unprecedented in its history. It was torn between the forces of Pan-Islamism and those of Pan-Arabism, between these forces and those of local nationalism, between the forces of progress and those of reaction, and between the forces of capitalism and those of socialism. In their manifestations, all these trends in the Middle East had negative implications for Ethiopia.

In its most fundamentalist form, pan-Islamism recognized only two kinds of territories: that which is inhabited by the community of believers (dar'al Islam) and that which is inhabited by the community of infidels (dar'al harb). According to the principle of jihad, since dar'al Islam recognized no boundaries imposed by dar'al harb, the normal condition between the two

communities is one of war, at least until such time as the whole world is transformed into an Islamic state<sup>27</sup>. In this sense, pan-Islamism makes it a duty upon dar'al Islam (the community of the Islamic world) not only to liberate Ethiopian Muslims from rule by the infidel but also to absorb the Ethiopian Christians into the Islamic world. In its more tamed post-war version, pan-Islamism makes it incumbent upon Muslims to collaborate with their co-religionists. The most consistent adherents of pan-Islamism have been Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.

As far as its implications for Ethiopia are concerned, Pan-Arabism is a variation of the same theme. Article 7 of the 1947 Ba'th Party Programme provided: "The Arab fatherland is that part of the globe inhabited by the Arab nation which stretches from the Taurus Mountain, Poucht-I-Kouh Mountains, the Gulf of Basra, the Arab Ocean, the Ethiopian mountains, the Sahara, the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean." Thus,, the Ba'thist governments of Syria and Iraq would be proponents of carving out the Ethiopian lowlands and annexing them into the greater Arabian fatherland.

Yet again, the Middle East was divided along east-west lines. The starting point of this was the defeat of the Arabs in the Palestinian war of 1948 which in its wake gave rise to an anti-west and an anti-government fervour resulting in coups, revolutions and assassinations during the early 1950's. Obviously, this tended to suck the extra-regional powers into the politics of the Middle East. In 1957, for instance, Eisenhower's Doctrine declared the exposure of the Middle East to communist expansion and offered economic and military assistance to friendly states in the region (a term which apparently included Ethiopia) and direct military intervention should the friendly countries come under attack from communist forces of the region or of the Soviet Union<sup>28</sup>. This led to the subsequent radicalization of Egypt, Algeria, Libya, South Yemen and the Palestinian movement, all of which became hostile to

Ethiopia because of her close associations with the US. In fact, radio Cairo had, since the early 1950's, been running an anti-Ethiopian campaign in the languages of the Horn of Africa and Egypt's radicalization only reinforced an already existing trend. The Eisenhower Doctrine in fact suggested the formation of an alliance between a group of Middle Eastern countries including Ethiopia in order to counter the influence of the radical states; however, Ethiopia could not even be a party to any association of conservative Arab states for reasons explained earlier. Her only choice was to throw in her lot with Israel, a move which aggravated the Arab states even further.

Implicit in all this is the fact that the Middle East emerged in the post-war years not as one but as many independent sovereign states. This is best reflected in the Charter of the League of Arab States (1945) which, in its preamble and Article 5 in particular, recognized as valid all the attributes of European states. Again, as states, some of the Arab and Afro-Arab countries have interests that go against those of Ethiopia. In this regard, mention could be made of the Yemen's interest in the control of the Red Sea and Ethiopia's islands there, Egypt's and Sudan's interests in the Nile, and the latter's interest in controlling common frontier regions and guerilla movements and activities. Since the most important conflict of interest with Ethiopia has been that of Somalia, further discussion of this particular country is warranted.

In 1960, a republic of Somalia emerged as an independent sovereign state composed of the ex-British and ex-Italian Somalilands. The designation "Afro-Arab" appears appropriate to the new republic since on the one hand, it is situated on the continent of Africa and it became a member of the OAU, and on the other hand, it became a member of the League of Arab States in 1973, the charter of which in article 1 requires its members to be independent Arab states. Ethnically and linguistically,

the Somalis are not Arabs; the attraction of League membership appears to have been such provisions as article 6 of its Charter which declared that if one of the members were a victim of aggression, the League would "... determine the measures necessary to repulse the aggression", a provision approaching something like a mutual defence pact.

The source of conflict between the Republic of Somalia and its neighbouring countries (Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti) is her stated policy of bringing all the Somali peoples in those countries under her rule (pan-Somalism). Stated from a different perspective, the particular issue between Somalia and Ethiopia could be said to have emanated from the annexation of the Ogaden by the Ethiopian monarch (Menelik) in the late 19th century, though, despite her official pronouncements to the contrary, the republic's claims extend to vast territories beyond the Somali inhabited region of the Ogaden. Be that as it may, pan-Somalism led the republic to condemn the existing boundaries between herself and neighbouring countries as impositions of imperial powers and launched a diplomatic and military offensive to have them revised. The acceptance by African countries of the sanctity of colonial boundaries, as reflected in article 2 and 3 (3) of the OAU Charter of 1963, afforded Ethiopia a substantial amount of diplomatic support in her drive to stave off Somalia's claims. Though the provisions of the Charter of the League of Arab States on the question of territorial integrity of independent states is the same as that of the OAU Charter, the members of the League and other Moslem states provided Somalia with diplomatic and material support in her drive to bring about the unity of the Somali Peoples.

At the founding congress of the OAU in 1963, President Osman of Somalia condemned Ethiopia as expansionist, claimed that the Somali question was unique and demanded self-determination for all Somali People. The Ethiopian prime minister, Aklilou Habte-Wolde,

retorted in kind: it was Somalia which was obsessed with territorial aggrandizement; all African states must respect existing territorial boundaries whatever their merit. Somalia failed to make headway on the diplomatic front; on the contrary, at the Cairo meeting of the OAU in 1964, the organization reaffirmed its commitment to the principle of territorial integrity only in clearer and stronger terms.

From February to March 1964, open warfare broke out between Ethiopia and Somalia along their common frontier. After many OAU committee meetings and good offices, the parties were able to reach an agreement on cease-fire, a demilitarized zone six to ten miles deep on each side of the border, and a cessation of hostile propaganda by press and radio. After a short lull, hostilities broke out again in 1965. Somalia raised the question of the Ogaden once more and Ethiopia reacted by cutting diplomatic relations and by closing the border because of alleged arms smuggling into Ethiopia across the frontier. In the following year, the focus of conflict between the two states became Djibouti, a conflict provoked by De Gaulle's visit to the territory in August of that year and by the resulting expectation that the territory was about to become independent. As it happened, De Gaulle submitted the question to a referendum and the people of Djibouti decided to stay under French administration. Djibouti being an important port and inhabited by Afars and Somalis, two ethnic groups who also live in Ethiopia and Somalia, was yet another bone of contention between the two states<sup>29</sup>.

Detente between them came in the wake of Somali elections of July 1967 when Shermarke became president and Igal prime minister. In September, a Somali delegation led by Igal met with Ethiopia's cabinet and agreed to end the state of emergency along the Ethio-Somali frontier which had been in force since 1964, to conclude further agreements regarding cultural and commercial exchanges, and to establish a permanent

advisory commission on a ministerial level to consider mutual problems. These agreements were concluded and in the following year endorsed by the Somali parliament. The pan-Africanist and architect of rapprochement, Igal, abandoned Somalia's territorial claims on Ethiopia but at the same time insisted on the granting of the right of self-determination to the Ethiopian Somalis<sup>30</sup>. President Bare, who took power through a coup of October 1969, declared that Somalia would honour its legitimate international treaties and obligations; thus, Igal's rapprochement seemed to hold but only until 1972 when Somali hostilities resumed with a vengeance. By then Bare's adoption of socialism had made his country the beneficiary of substantial military aid from the Soviet Union.

It is submitted that it was in these global and regional contexts that the oppositions against the ancien regime of the 1960's (the alienation and resistance in the south-east, in the north and in the centre) can best be understood. In fact, it is difficult to disentangle the resistance in the south-east (among the Somali of the Ogaden and the Oromo of Bale) from the military activities and sabotage of the adjoining Republic of Somalia. The Western Somali Liberation Front, (WSLF) which had the aim of liberating the Muslim Somalis of the Ogaden, was formed in Mogadishu (the capital city of the Republic of Somalia) in 1960, the year when the Republic became independent. A movement, which had the aim of liberating the Muslim Oromos of Bale, was established at about the same time. From 1966 to 1970, the two liberation movements operated in close collaboration with each other also drawing much of their assistance from the Republic of Somalia. The alliance between the two movements came to an end in 1970 because Bare, on account of his continued rapprochement with Ethiopia, put the WSLF leadership behind bars, and because the leader of the Bale movement gave himself up to the Ethiopian authorities. WSLF was reactivated in the early 1970's, as was a

splinter group of ~~the Bale~~ <sup>movement.</sup> (the Ethiopian National Liberation Front); this time the latter had as its focus the liberation of the "oppressed" peoples of Ethiopia, especially the Oromo<sup>31</sup>.

The Republic of Somalia's support for WSLF can be explained by its commitment to pan-Somali and pan-Islamic ideologies but its support for the ~~Bale~~ <sup>movement</sup> can be explained only by the latter of the two ideologies since the Oromo of Bale though Muslim are ethnically different from the Somali. In fact, the Oromo are the biggest linguistic group in Ethiopia and the Oromo of Bale are a small part of that ethnic group. This argument is further supported by the jurisdictional claim of the Somali Youth League of 1959 and later of the Republic of Somalia itself over the bulk of the Muslims in the region including the Afars of Ethiopia<sup>32</sup>. No less important are also the economic and strategic advantages involved in expanding to include the Ogaden and Bale.

The second centre of opposition to the ancien regime was Eritrea in the north and north-east of the country occupying all of Ethiopia's coast from the Sudan to Djibouti. Egypt and Pakistan, which had an associate status at the Council of Foreign Ministers, were the most adamant supporters of Eritrean independence when the question was being considered by that body from 1945 to 1948. When in 1948 the question came before the General Assembly of the UN, these countries spearheaded the Islamic hostility to the proposal of Eritrean unity with Ethiopia. During the 1940's Eritrean Moslems mostly supported the independence solution and the highland Christians the unionist solution. Taking the whole population of Eritrea, the unionist solution was the proposal which had the most substantial following<sup>33</sup>.

The idea of an independent Eritrea was kept alive by Cairo's radio broadcasts starting from at least the middle of the 1950's. These called for the secession of the region from Ethiopia. The price Egypt sought to exact from Ethiopia for the latter's association with the US<sup>34</sup>.

Egypt followed this in 1958 by training the first Eritrean fighters in a camp near Alexandria as part of its campaign against "reactionary" governments of the region and by sending the best officers among them to the Soviet Union for further training<sup>35</sup>. By the end of the 1960's many disaffected Eritreans, especially Muslims, had left the region and gone to Egypt either because they did not approve of the federal solution of the General Assembly of 1952, or because Haile Selassie's government was unduly intrusive in matters that came under local jurisdiction, or because the Muslims and Christians in the Eritrean assembly could not see eye to eye on a number of issues which in turn led to the alienation of the former. In 1960, those who were trained abroad formed the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and launched their armed struggle in the following year.

In 1962, the Eritrean Assembly decided to dissolve the federal structure and unite Eritrea with Ethiopia, a move which Haile Selassie's government is widely believed to have instigated. The dissolution of the federation is often taken as the cause of secession; however, given the trends prior to 1962, it is doubtful if Eritrea would have taken a different course than it did anyhow.

The ELF was primarily based on the Muslim half of the Eritrean population; the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), which was to take the secessionists struggle to the Christian highlanders and finally develop into the dominant group, emerged as one of the factions that broke away from the ELF towards the end of the 1960's. The ELF was conservative whereas the EPLF became radically left of centre. The radicalization of the latter was part of the general trend among the Ethiopian students, in the Middle East (particularly the Palestinians) as well as in the west. There is circumstantial evidence to suggest that as the ELF was supported by the conservative forces in the Middle East so was the EPLF by the radical forces of the region such as leftist sections of the PLO, Syria, and South Yemen.

The Egyptian military training programme of 1958 was continued until 1967 followed by Algeria, the PLO, Libya, Syria and South Yemen; other strong supporters included Somalia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. In addition to providing arms, funds and wide press coverage, the Arab countries served as intermediaries between the socialist countries and the Eritrean insurgents. For example, in December 1964, large shipments of Soviet light weapons were transmitted to Eritrea through Syria and the Sudan. Further, Soviet, Czech, and Chinese automatic weapons including Soviet AD47's, rockets, mortars and Sam7 hitseek missiles and Chinese plastic mines were ferried across the Red Sea from South Yemen to Eritrea.

Arab organizations have had the Eritrean question on their agenda and have at times even allowed the secessionist organization to attend their proceedings. For example, the League of Arab States has entertained the question since at least 1962 and, in 1969, the leader of the ELF was allowed to attend its meeting as an observer. The periodic Islamic conferences (the Council of Arab Parliamentary Union and the Federation of Arab Lawyers) have expressed their support for Eritrean independence time and again.<sup>36</sup>

Sudan's position on the Eritrean question is uniquely important. Under pressure from the Arab world and domestic fundamentalist and leftist movements, it has kept its frontiers open for Eritrean insurgents except for two relatively short interludes. In the early 1960's, President Aboud of Sudan agreed to close the frontier to Eritrean ~~secessionists~~ in exchange for Ethiopia doing the same to southern Sudanese insurgents. However, the agreement came to an end with the overthrow of Aboud in 1964. A similar agreement was again concluded between President Numeri and Haile Selassie which was effective only for two years (1972 to 1974).<sup>37</sup>

Despite the preponderance of Christians in Eritrea in terms of numbers as well as political organization, some Arab states regarded Eritrea as a Muslim community

and their support for its independence as a form of jihad against the Christian regime of Haile Selassie. For example, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia is reported to have said that his government's policy was to create an Islamic state of Eritrea. Others have seen Eritrea as part of the Arab fatherland; in 1969, for instance, Arab supporters are reported to have described Eritrean secessions as: "... a streak of red Arab revolution into the black continent". In 1975, the Kuwaiti Minister of Cabinet Affairs "regretted the blood shed, destruction and catastrophe which had taken place in that dear part of the Arab nation"<sup>38</sup>.

The third focus of dissension was the centre; the opposition there also had its genesis in 1960. In December of that year, the commander of the Royal Bodyguard, General Mengistu Neway, and his American-educated and radical brother, Germame Neway, used the Bodyguard to launch a coup against Haile Selassie and proclaimed his replacement as king by his son, the crown prince Merid Azmach Asfaw Wosen. However, the loyalist generals used the other sections of the army to put the rebellion down within three days; apparently, the US Military Advisory Mission also helped in providing aerial photography to the loyalists. When it transpired that they were losing the battle, the brothers had the high government officials, whom they had under detention, massacred. Several days later, Germame shot his brother and himself; however, Mengistu survived, only to be tried and hanged afterwards.

It is not clear whether the coup was another instance of the many intrigues and plots that preceded it or whether its leaders had revolutionary economic and political programmes<sup>39</sup>. Interestingly enough, neither the leaders of the coup nor those who took part in the rallies and demonstrations so much as mentioned the king let alone criticised him; Haile Selassie was still "elect of God" and beyond reproach. However, everyone knew that the coup was all about him; they also knew that all the

speeches about the backwardness of the country were directed against him. In effect, the political discourse (initially conducted in private ) that the coup unleashed had the immediate effect of stripping the monarch of his divine status and of subjecting his ministers to a greater degree of criticism and charges of corruption than ever before.

Yet another impact of the abortive coup appears to have been the government's speeding up of the processes of modernization. The number of civil servants increased from 35,000 in 1960 to 100,000 by 1974. The army was 45,000 strong in 1974<sup>40</sup>. The teachers and students' population showed a similar growth in the same period: the number of enrolled secondary school students in 1970 was 70,000 and the number of enrolled university students in 1974 was 6,000 with a further 2,000 studying abroad<sup>41</sup>. The number of private enterprises also increased substantially with the result that the labour force grew from 28,000 in 1961 to over 51,000 in 1971<sup>42</sup>. Moreover, these social sectors were allowed to organize themselves into unions and associations . For example, though the revised Constitution of 1955 had allowed the formation of trade unions, the enabling legislation was not issued until 1962 when the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions was launched for the first time. By 1974, the size of the Confederation had grown to about 80,000. Subsequently, the teachers, students and other professional associations emerged with government sanctions.

It was these social elements and corporate groups (institutions adapted from European models) which were most influenced by the enlightenment that ensued from the abortive coup of 1960. Initially, their grievances had been corporatist; as the decade wore on, however, they became more and more political; no doubt, some groups became more politically conscious than others. Thus, in the course of the decade, the rank and file of the loyalist army went directly to the palace several times

and successfully petitioned the king for pay increases. By 1974, there were also apparently mess committees within the various units issuing lists of grievances<sup>43</sup>. The demands of the other groups were not met with such success; by and large, their petitions were kept at the level of the relevant ministries and their demands for pay increases, the right to form associations and for improved conditions of work remained unsatisfied. No doubt, the preferential treatment of the army further alienated both the trade unions which came under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the civil servants who came under various other ministries.

The politicisation of the grievances was spearheaded by the university and school students. During the coup, the former did demonstrate against the government but only under pressure from General Mengistu himself. By the middle of the 1960's, however, their associations had constituted what came to be known as the Ethiopian Student's Movement (ESM)- with branch associations in Addis Ababa, Western Europe and north America- advocating radical reforms concerning land redistribution and democratic rights; by the end of the decade, all the branch associations had adopted Marxism-Leninism as the appropriate ideology to pursue and had committed themselves to the overthrow of the existing "Feudo-capitalist" order; and, by 1974, the associations had become the basis for the organization of Leninist-Maoist parties.<sup>44</sup>

The abortive coup of 1960 was important in discrediting the ancien regime in the eyes of, amongst other, the students. Once the ESM came into existence, however, it was swept off the ground not by trends in the Middle East as in the case of the regional rebellions, but rather by European ideologies and organizational models; it was a by-product of neocolonialism in the sense that ESM was a part of the western anti-authoritarian anti-imperialist movement of the 1960's, and particularly militant variant of it at that.

While the movement's heroes were Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Castro, and Che Guevara about whom songs and poems were written by its partisans and while the literature most widely read were the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao as well as the Peking review and an assortment of pamphlets written in the name of the Chinese communes, the bulk of these books and articles came, interestingly enough, not from the east but from the west. The channels of ideological transmissions were the classrooms, conversations with the western instructors who fancied themselves radical, the libraries, and the journeys by Ethiopians mostly to the west. For example, out of the 4,500 university graduates by 1974, about 1,000 were educated abroad; further, the branch associations of the ESM in western Europe worked closely with groups radically to the left of centre. Even the army was not spared exposure to the west; in addition to fighting in Korea and the Congo (1950 and 1961 respectively), a lot of commissioned and non-commissioned officers were sent to the US for short-term training.

On the whole, it appears that the students' appraisal of the internal Ethiopian situation left something to be desired. Certainly, student papers made an attempt at analysing such questions as feudalism and national self-determination; more often than not, however, they were mechanical applications of Marxist concepts in the Ethiopian context. The earlier generation of young Ethiopian intellectuals (Japanizers) produced a more objective and original literature on their period than did the leftist radicals of the 1960's of theirs. It appears that the ESM was gripped more by an external ideology than by the immediate circumstances of the Ethiopian workers and peasants, circumstances which it was hard put to try and recast in the Marxian mould.

Centrally important was the fact that the opposition forces (the rebellions in the peripheries and the

dissensions at the centre) had the impact of radicalizing and reinforcing each others' outlooks, grievances and alienations from the regime. For example, by the end of the 1960's, the bulk of the army was pinned down by the rebels in the peripheries and, hence, forced to live in the arid and semi-arid regions of the lowlands often exposed to thirst, hunger and squalid conditions of life as well as to eminent danger of death in a war the end of which it could not see. More important was the vanguardship of the students' movement in radicalizing the civil servants and workers. The graduates of the academically advanced military establishments (the Harar Academy, the Air Force, the Navy and the Abadina Police) were often allowed to go to the university in Ethiopia or abroad for degree courses; there, they would obviously engage in a mutual exchange of outlook with members of ESM. Moreover, the 4,500 university and 20,000 school graduates who had joined the public and private sectors can only be assumed to have gone to those places with their ideas; the fact that some of the leaders of the teachers' associations and of the Confederation of the Ethiopian labour Unions were identifying themselves with the students' movement in 1974 can be attributed to this trend. Yet another important development towards the end of 1960's, was the popularization, by the Addis Ababa University students, of the thorny question of the right of national self determination as an appropriate solution in the Ethiopian context. This gave secession a cloak of respectability that had not been there previously. One of the spin-offs of this was the departure of the Eritrean students and graduates from Addis Ababa and Asmara en masse to the ELF culminating finally in the emergence of the EPLF led by leftist elites.

Moreover, the internal forces of opposition had an impact not only on each other but also transnationally, disorientating the ancien regime more than ever before. In 1972 and 1973, the only comfort for the regime came from the diplomatic support of the African countries on

the Eritrean and Ogaden questions and from the rapprochement with the Sudanese government which restricted the movement of Eritrean rebels across the frontiers of the two countries. By contrast, Ethiopia's relations with the Arabs, Israel and the US reached truly crisis proportions.

In 1972, North Yemen and South Yemen, supported by Arab campaigns, laid claim to Ethiopia's group of islands in the Red Sea, because, they maintained, Ethiopia had allowed Israel to build a military base there. No amount of denial by Ethiopia of the existence of such a base would temper the Arab demand for the islands<sup>45</sup>. Towards the end of the same year, Somalia, which by then had become a strong military power on account of Soviet aid, sent a probing force into the Ogaden near to where oil and natural gas deposits were found. Ethiopia drove the invading force out by simply cutting its only supply of water and deploying a substantial military force in the area. Between March and April 1973, there was yet another military confrontation between the two countries near the town of Dolo (close to the Kenyan border) again near an area where a natural gas deposits had been struck during the previous December. Since 1972, therefore, the two countries had engaged in a war of words, with Somalia, claiming that it was in imminent danger of aggression by Ethiopian forces and the latter that it had been invaded by Somali infiltrators<sup>47</sup>.

More important for Haile Selassie's beleaguered government was the pressure that the Arab countries brought to bear on Ethiopia during and around the time of the tenth anniversary of the OAU in May 1973. Before the summit, Syria and Libya condemned Ethiopia for standing in the way of the aspirations of the Eritrean and Somali peoples and further insisted that the headquarters of the OAU should be transferred to Cairo or the summit should be boycotted unless Ethiopia cut diplomatic relations with Israel. The summit was saved and held in Addis Ababa because Haile Selassie managed to persuade Sadat,

Bare and the others to attend; however, the Arab diplomatic offensive continued during its proceedings: they insisted that Ethiopia cut her relations with Israel. On her part, Somalia urged the heads of states to have the courage to resolve the "territorial" dispute over the Ogaden and demanded that Ethiopia be stopped from amassing her forces in the region.

During the summit, President Boumeidian of Algeria apparently promised the Ethiopian authorities that if Ethiopia severed her diplomatic relations with Israel, he would use his influence to discourage Arab support for the ELF. This was welcomed by the Ethiopian prime minister, Aklilou Habte-Wolde, who canvassed cabinet support for the proposal in June and July; finally, after a great deal of soul-searching, the cabinet decided to end diplomatic relations with Israel. However, the king vetoed the decision. Then came the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973 followed immediately by the African states cutting diplomatic relations with Israel one after the other. Haile Selassie was then persuaded to follow suit; on October 23 Ethio-Israeli diplomatic relations were also severed<sup>48</sup>.

In October 1973, the ancien regime lost not only its good friend and ally (Israel) without securing any hard commitment of Arab neutrality on the Ogaden and Eritrean questions but was also relegated to the outer perimeters of US security policy priorities. In 1972 the US pursued a hands-off policy on the Arab claim of the Ethiopian Red Sea islands; by contrast, Israel offered military assistance at the time though Ethiopia declined the offer for fear of invoking an Arab backlash. Also, at the time of the Arab diplomatic offensive in May 1973, Haile Selassie went to the US and asked President Nixon to provide him with modern fighter planes, M60 tanks and air-to-ground missiles in order to offset Somali modern weapons provided by the Soviet Union. He returned disappointed, having received a promise of defensive weapons only. Finally, during the month when Ethiopia

cut her relations with Israel (October 1973) the US told the regime of its intention to close the Kagnev communications facilities which was one of the major factors that had brought the two governments together in the first place.

All this was in stark contrast to previous US policies towards Ethiopia, to, for instance, the Eisenhower Doctrine which proposed a direct US intervention should its allies in the Middle East, including Ethiopia, be threatened by regional or Soviet communist expansionism. The reasons for the decline of US interest in Ethiopia in the early 1970's are of interest. According to an American who for a long time was adviser to the Ethiopian Foreign Office (John H. Spencer), the explanations for the US handsoff policy in the 1972 Ethio-Arab confrontation over the Red Sea islands, and for President Nixon's refusal to provide weapons to Ethiopia were detente between the superpowers, a perceived need to accommodate the Arabs, and the US's wish not to be identified with the monarch against whom the Ethiopian middle class was becoming increasingly hostile. The Americans also realized that, because of his age, the Emperor was finding it difficult to reach decisions with the result that government activities were coming to a halt.<sup>49</sup> Most observers agree that the reasons for US loss of interest in the communications facilities was the advance in technology which rendered them obsolete and the US acquisition of new facilities in Diago Garcia which could be used instead of Kagnev.

The suggestion made in relation to detente does not make much sense, as it had not led to a super-power disengagement in the Middle East as reflected by the US continued support for Israel and the conservative Arab states; and by Soviet support for the radical Arab states. A relevant example of this might have been Soviet challenge to the US in the Horn of Africa: the former was building up the Somali Military forces and in 1973 was, according to western reports, in the process of

completing the construction of a military base in Berbera (Somalia). On the other hand, the explanation of the United States policy of Arab accommodation makes a lot of sense. By 1971, the formation of OPEC had reached an advanced state thus enabling the Arabs to control oil prices in the subsequent years and in 1973 to use the ensuing power as a diplomatic weapon. This Arab ascendancy of power and prestige was celebrated by Africa as a victory against western domination. The west, (including most notably the US which had great fear of being victimized because of its alliance with Israel), was forced to acknowledge the fact and accommodate itself to the changed circumstances. No doubt, accommodating the Arabs in this sense implied at least neutrality over Arab policies towards countries that mattered less to the US (like Ethiopia). Accommodation also seems to have meant supporting, or rather not opposing vigorously, Arab policies towards the Red Sea islands, Eritrea and the Ogaden. Similarly, Ethiopia's severance of diplomatic relations with Israel and its willingness to demote relations with the US was influenced by its fear of Middle Eastern ascendancy. Also, the reference made to domestic "middle class" opposition against the ancien regime can only make sense in the context of the opposition that was building up among the students, civil servants and workers as explained above, since this was the only form of opposition that was in existence at the time. What is more, the opposition had been taking an increasingly leftist stance, condemning, above all, "US imperialism" and Haile Selassie as its puppet. It is probable that the US may well have been further alienated by the anti-imperialist rhetoric of the opposition in Ethiopia.

To sum up, the aristocracy which had lost its military and administrative functions to the new elite was no longer the pillar of the monarchy; rather, the latter had become dependent on the new military and civilian elite. However, in the course of the 1960's and

1970's, the new elite, armed with western ideology, became the main antithesis of the ancien regime. Moreover, alienated from the centre and backed by Ethiopia's traditional opponents (the countries of the Middle East), certain of the peoples on the peripheries (the Somali's, the Oromo of Bale and the Eritreans) had raised arms against the ancien regime and had, by 1974, managed to pin down the national army in those regions. Finally, in the early 1970's, the ancien regime lost its western allies (the US and Israel) at a time when the Middle East was in the ascendant because of the power and prestige it derived from its ability to control oil prices. These developments coupled with the anachronisms and inherent weaknesses of Haile Selassie's autocracy, had so weakened the state that it had almost ceased to function when the urban uprising broke out in 1974.

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33. See note 10 above, p. 24.
35. See note 27 above, p. 124.
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## PART ONE

### THE COLLAPSE OF THE OLD-STATE (JANUARY - NOVEMBER 1974)

#### CHAPTER TWO

##### The Urban Uprising of January to June, 1974

The main actors of the popular uprising that erupted from January to June, 1974, against Haile-Selassie's government were the armed forces, the teachers, the students, the trade unions and the civil servants. The armed forces, without whose collaboration the other groups would have found it difficult to put up resistance against the government, were composed of five divisions consisting of tens of brigades and battalions dotted all over the country. Bodyguard, was situated in the capital, Addis Ababa, as was the Fourth Division, which had brigades and battalions in the provinces. The Second Division, also known as the Northern Forces, and the Third Division were based in Eritrea and Hararge Provinces respectively. The Fifth Division was an amalgam of various specialized units mainly located in and around Addis Ababa.

On January 12, 1974, the privates and NCO's of the 24th brigade (Fourth Division) situated in the town of Negele (Sidamo province) mutinied and placed their officers under arrest. They then demanded to see senior government officials who would meet their demands, which included pay and pension increases, better food allowances, injury benefits, improved living quarters, removal of disciplinary injustices, price control and access to water wells<sup>1</sup>. When General Derese Dubale, Commander of the Ground Forces, was sent to Negele, the mutineers placed him under arrest, apparently because

they wanted to see a higher official than him. They released him after a week only because they were flattered to receive a letter from the King sent through General Assefa Abera, Commander of the Air Force, promising them that their demands would be met. On his release, General Dersese Dubale was sent to Dolo (a town on the Ethio-Kenyan border) where a battalion of the 24th brigade was in mutiny. There he was made to sit under the scorching sun for half a day and, when thirsty and hungry, treated to dirty water and bread full of grit. The general was told that that was what the soldiers normally ate and drank<sup>2</sup>.

The Negele-Dolo incidents passed unreported and, as a result, the civilian population was quite unaware of them. However, they sent waves of unrest within the army, where the control over the use of communication facilities seems to have suddenly become rather lax. For example, a similar thing to the Negele-Dolo mutiny took place in the Debre-Zeit Air Force (some fifty kilometers outside the capital) from February 10 -13. Also, the radical elements in the Air Force and in the First, Second and Fourth Divisions established co-ordinating committees in the course of the same month and started mobilizing the army to come up with more and more extreme demands<sup>3</sup>.

In the third week of February, 1974, certain sections of the civilian population started their uprising, it seems, quite independently from that of the army. On February 18, (the official day for the beginning of the uprising) the taxi drivers, the teachers and students went on strikes and demonstrations.

In the wake of the Arab-Israeli war and the dramatic petrol price increases, Ethiopia had to buy the commodity on the international market in 1974 for three times the previous year's price. As a result, in January 1974, Ethiopia increased the price of petrol to the consumer by 50%<sup>4</sup>. The Addis Ababa taxi drivers, numbering over a thousand, who felt that a part of their income had been

unduly whittled down, withdrew their services and went on demonstration starting from February 18, demanding the reduction of petrol prices.

By 1974, the eighteen thousand strong Ethiopian Teachers' Association had been engaged, without any success, in a protracted negotiation with the Ministry of education concerning pay increases and salary scales, for at least six years<sup>5</sup>. In January and February, 1974, the teachers were further aggravated by an educational reform programme (The Sector Review) adopted by the government in December, 1973<sup>6</sup>, to which they took exception particularly because it advocated universal education up to fourth grade followed by vocational training thereafter. The teachers felt that this was tantamount to condemning the children of the poor to perpetual subservience to those of the rich who could always afford private education beyond the fourth grade leading them to more successful careers. Upon learning that the taxi drivers were going to go on strike as of February 18, the Teachers' Association decided to join them and bring the country's educational system to a standstill on the same day. Having been highly politicized since the late sixties, the Association's petitions on February 18, did not limit itself to matters concerned with teachers (salary scales and the Sector Review) but extended to demands like the following: the liberalization of the laws concerning the right to demonstrate, minimum wages for all wage earners, pay increases for factory workers, price control, pensions for industrial workers, improvement of the laws concerning dismissal of workers, regular employment for temporary workers, the cessation of judges and other high officials from becoming members of company board of governors, granting of employment priorities to Ethiopians as opposed to aliens, expansion of employment opportunities, and the right to organize trade unions for employees of certain organisations.<sup>7</sup>

The students, who, since the late sixties, had deliberately abandoned pursuing corporatist interests in

favour of advocating a fundamental political change through class boycotts, demonstrations and the distribution of anti-government leaflets, found in the taxi drivers and teachers long sought-after allies and, on February 18, poured out onto the streets of Addis Ababa chanting revolutionary slogans and agitating resistance against the government. The events of that day also aroused the rebellious mood of the capital's lumpen proletariat into action<sup>8</sup>.

Addis Ababa and the neighbouring towns, to which the resistance spread very quickly, became engulfed in disturbances for about a week starting from February 18. There were riotous demonstrations<sup>9</sup>, the stoning of buses and luxury cars<sup>10</sup> in an attempt to bring public transport to a halt and the robbing and destroying of property.<sup>11</sup> On February 24, it was reported that the taxi drivers, students and the lumpen proletariat had caused in and around Addis Ababa the deaths of three and the wounding of twenty-two individuals, and had damaged seventy-five buses, sixty-nine cars, two trains, a motor-bike and thirty-eight houses.<sup>12</sup>

The government's response to these challenges was one of sticks and carrots. On February 22, the Ministry of Interior indicated that the police had been authorized to take stern measures in order to uphold law and order, warned parents to stop their children engaging in disturbances and urged teachers and taxi drivers to go back to work<sup>13</sup>. Two days later, it was reported that a total of five hundred and fifty-eight taxi drivers and other individuals had been placed under arrest for distributing anti-government leaflets, breaking cars, causing physical damage to persons and for robbery<sup>14</sup>. In a radio and television address of February 21, on the other hand, the King announced that the Sector Review had been suspended, reassured the teachers that their other demands would be met within a month and urged them to resume teaching. In the same address, he explained that, despite the implications to the National Economic Plan,

he had ordered the reduction of petrol prices<sup>15</sup>. As it happened, the price was reduced by ten cents, and not by twenty-five cents, which is the amount by which it had increased several weeks earlier<sup>16</sup>. Further, on February 23, it was reported that the Ministries of Defence and Interior, in accordance with the King's orders, had increased the salary of soldiers and policemen by eighteen birr (about nine U.S. dollars) each and announced that the salary scale for officers and payment for special skills would be studied and implemented in the future<sup>17</sup>

In spite of these responses, the government's troubles took a dramatic turn for the worse. By the end of February, 1974, what is usually referred to as "the first round of military and police uprising" was in full swing. In addition to the co-ordinating committees at the unit level, there was now a co-ordinating committee of thirty men from the armed forces established in the headquarters of the Fourth Division (Addis Ababa), claiming to represent all the military units except the navy<sup>18</sup>. On February 26, the Second Division seized the radio station in Asmara (Eritrea) and broadcast its objection to the pay increases of several days earlier as being inadequate, and its many other demands, not all of which were limited to matters concerning the armed forces. On the next day, representatives of the various military units in and around Addis Ababa went to the King<sup>19</sup> and submitted their demands including, it appears, freedom of political parties, the democratic election of administrators, land reform, the improvement of employee-employer regulations, freeing of all political prisoners, free education for every-one, enforcement of necessary price controls, the appearance in court of the government officials who directly and indirectly embezzled public funds and belongings, salary rises for members of the army and other workers in accordance with prevailing market prices and the formation of a committee

including members of the army and the civilian public to follow up the enforcement of the above points<sup>20</sup>.

Faced with such formidable mutiny, the King had no choice but to give in to the demands of the armed forces. In his February 27 address to the representatives of the armed forces, the King appealed to their nationalism and pleaded with them not to ask for more than the country could afford, and to protect the country<sup>21</sup>. On the next day, he also gave an audience to representatives of the Second Division and promised to meet their demands<sup>22</sup>. On March 1, it was announced that the privates had been given a pay rise of thirty birr (about fifteen U.S. dollars) instead of the eighteen birr previously promised, a pension rise of twenty birr (about ten U.S. dollars) and promised to pay twenty birr for special skills to privates and officers alike<sup>23</sup>. It seems they were also promised the establishment of a committee to go into their other grievances.

A more interesting effect of "the first round of military and police uprising" was the sudden resignation of the Prime Minister, Tshafi Tizaz Akililou Habte-Wolde, and his cabinet on February 27<sup>24</sup>. On February 24, as a result of the demand of the coordinating committee of the armed forces. On the following day it was reported that the King had accepted Akililou's resignation<sup>25</sup>, and, apparently, appointed General Abiy Ababe as Prime Minister; however, upon being told that the army preferred Lij Endalkachew Mekonnen as Prime Minister, changed his mind and appointed the general as Minister of Defence and Endaldachew as Prime Minister<sup>26</sup>. It is clear that there were personal rivalries between members of the old cabinet and also group rivalries between the class of an aristocratic elite, to which dignitaries like Lij Endaldachew and General Abiy belonged, on one hand, and the government technocrats of a humbler origin to which officials like Tshafi Tizaz Akililou and most of his cabinet members belonged, on the other. What is not clear is whether such considerations motivated

Endalkachew to have the King informed that the armed forces did not want the old cabinet and whether the King, as a result, pressurised Akilou and his cabinet to resign.

An even more intriguing query is whether there was some kind of collusion between the activities of Endalkachew and his group, on the one hand, and those of the army, on the other. On February 28, the armed forces acted to arrest most members of Akilou's cabinet<sup>27</sup> though not Endalkachew, who was also a member of that cabinet as Minister of Posts and Communications. According to one source, at least, it was not the co-ordinating committee of thirty men from the NCO's that effected the arrests but another group of intermediate officers who brought the first committee under its influence towards the end of February, and which was led by Colonel Alem Zewd Tesema, Commander of the Airborn Brigade, Colonel Yigezu Yemane, Commander of the Army Aviation, Major Atnafu Abate of the Fourth Division, Junior Aircraftsman Girma Fissiha, Lieutenant Colonel Yilma Teshome of the Fourth Division, Lieutenant Colonel Afework of the Air Force, Colonel Fikru of the Fourth Division and Captain Demissie of the Addis Ababa police force<sup>28</sup>. Judging by the role that Colonel Alem Zewd's committee played in trying to quell the civilian uprising against the government in the subsequent months, it is pretty likely that Endalkachew had a hand in the formation and activities of the officers group.

In his first Prime Ministerial address to the nation through the mass media on February 28, 1974, Endaldachew outlined two matters as requiring his urgent attention: the safeguarding of the nation's peace and security and the continuation of governmental functions. Under the first strategy, he placed Addis Ababa under a 9.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m. curfew, brought the armed forces and the police under a single command within the Ministry of Defence and instructed them to apportion the city into zones and uphold law and order in their areas of

jurisdiction<sup>29</sup>. On a later occasion, Endalkachew explained that the need to involve the army in the maintenance of law and order arose from the conviction that a situation beyond the control of the police had arisen<sup>30</sup>. It appears that the command established under the presumably Ministry of Defence was none other than the intermediate officers group of late February, led by Alem Zewd Tesema.

Under the second strategy (continuation of governmental functions) Endalkachew took the interim measure of appointing himself as the Minister of Interior, in addition to his premiership, and of authorizing the highest officials in each Ministry to act as Ministers until such time as the members of the new cabinet were appointed<sup>31</sup>. The names of the new cabinet members were not announced until March 22<sup>32</sup>, because they were resident abroad at the time of their appointment<sup>33</sup>.

The March, 1974, resistance to Endalkachew's government was no less extreme than the resistance of the previous months. Satisfied, it seemed, with what they had achieved, the NCO-led mutineers went to the King, thanked him for the pay increases, expressed their loyalty to the crown, handed over the members of the old cabinet whom they had detained and retired to their barracks<sup>34</sup>. This marked the end of the so-called "first round of military uprising"; but the civilian resistance continued from where the soldiers had left off.

The radical elements within the civilian population accused the army of being interested only in pay increases for its members and of having betrayed the "people's movement" by going back to their barracks. They also argued that what was needed was not a reshuffle of the cabinet, but a more fundamental change. They distributed clandestine leaflets vilifying members of the new cabinet especially Endalkachew, by way of showing that the new cabinet was, if anything, worse than the old. Also, even if the strike of the Addis Ababa taxis drivers did not survive Aklilou's government, that of the

teachers continued until March 20, when they decided to resume teaching: even then, they added more demands to the ones issued by them a month earlier and made reservations to the decisions of the premier on March 14, regarding their previous petition<sup>35</sup>. The decision to resume teaching remained a theoretical one because the university and school students refused to attend classes, or did so intermittently, till the end of the academic year (June, 1974) because they felt their own demands were not met<sup>36</sup>. While, thus the educational system was in abeyance, several other groups went on strike and demonstration in March, 1974. In the hope of taking advantage of the chaotic conditions of the time, the inmates of the Addis Ababa prison (Kershele) went on the rampage for four days starting from March 2, resulting in shoot-outs and deaths among the prisoners and guards. The disturbance came to an end only because the government established a committee which would go into the grievances of the inmates<sup>37</sup>. The Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (Celu) brought the country to its knees by calling for a general strike of its 85,000 members to come into effect as of March 8. A deepening of the crisis was averted within four days with CELU concluding a seventeen point agreement with the central government in which the rights demanded were granted<sup>38</sup>. On March 11, the 800 employees of the Civil Aviation Agency petitioned the government to grant them the right to form a trade union, free medical services, the right to have their insurance paid for by the government, free education which would enable them to improve their professional skills, etc., and went on strike the same day<sup>39</sup>. As a result, flights were disrupted completely for three days and partially thereafter<sup>40</sup>. On March 13, the 350 employees of the Ethiopian Tobacco Monopoly submitted an eleven-point demand to the government and went on strike for a day and a half in spite of having agreed to suspend the strike by a month within which period their demands were to be met. Apart from demands

for the right to form a trade union, pay increases, over-time pay, bonuses, better health care and the like, they also requested the removal of the Chairman of the Monopoly's Board of Governors (Ato Tadesse Yacob)<sup>41</sup>. From then on, the request to have government officials dismissed became very common among strikers and demonstrators.

In addition to these strikes, there were a number of other organisations which submitted petitions to the government in March and threatened to go on strike if their demands were not met within a prescribed period of time. These included the teachers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Schools<sup>42</sup>, other employees of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church<sup>43</sup> and the employees of the Addis Ababa Municipality<sup>44</sup>.

Obviously, the question of whether the army was going to come on the side of the government and uphold law and order, or whether it was going to support the resistance to the government had, by now, become crucial for the outcome of the events of the time. But the army did not speak with one voice; as suggested earlier, it was divided between the officer-dominated group which was essentially pro status-quo and which felt that the changes of late February, 1974, were adequate, and the NCO-dominated group, which was after a more radical change, albeit inarticulate.

On March 14, for example, it was reported that representatives of the Fourth Division and the police of Eritrea went to the King and told him that he had done right in increasing the pay of members of the armed forces and of the police because, the representative argued, that section of the population was the least paid and added that the civilians, particularly the teachers, had no "right" to take advantage of the situation and ask for more pay because they had been educated at the expense of the country. Reportedly, the representatives also assured the King that they would crush those on strike should the King wish it<sup>45</sup>. Further, on March 16,

it was reported that a communiqué had been issued by the Ministry of Interior warning Addis Ababans against distributing defamatory leaflets, because the security forces had been authorized to take stern measures against those who engaged in such activities<sup>46</sup>. Thus, the government, with the assistance of the conservative elements within the security forces, did not take strong measures against the civilian opposition, perhaps because that resistance took the less disruptive form of strikes rather than unruly demonstrations.

A more convincing argument for the lack of strong action on the part of the government appears to be fear of a backlash from the radical NCO's and privates. Towards the beginning of March, leaflets were being distributed in the name of the army arguing that they had gone back to their barracks only because a government committee was established to go into their demands and that their demands to the King concerned the rights of the army as well as those of the civilian population<sup>47</sup>. In the subsequent weeks, a plot to overthrow the government including the King was being hatched by, it appears, the most radical elements among the NCO's and privates claiming to represent the First Division, the Fourth Division, the Air Force and the Paratroop Brigades. On the eve of the execution of the plot (March 24), the representatives met and agreed that the beginning of the coup d'état on the next morning would be marked by fighter planes flying over the capital while those on the ground would start taking over the national radio station and all other strategic places in the city. However, the representatives of the Paratroop Brigade could not agree to the plan to kill Col. Alem Zewd, who was commander of the same brigade, Chairman of the Joint Military and Police Command recently established under the Ministry of Defence and confidante of Endalkachew. When the others refused to accept the open protest of the Paratroop Brigade representative, he walked out on them

and exposed the whole plot to the Ministry of Defence directly<sup>48</sup>.

By the next morning, the Ministry of Defence had moved to have the rebels rounded up and the runway of the Air Force base in Debre Zeit blocked with the help of the paratroopers. On March 27, it was reported that the radio station and the airport in Asmara (Eritrea) were being guarded by pro-government members of the security forces because, it was explained, some units within the army and the police of the province were in rebellion and that the people were being advised, through the radio, to go about their business normally because the situation was under control<sup>49</sup>. However, it was not until April 2, that the government officially admitted that there had ever been an attempted coup d'état, and even then under pressure from the armed forces<sup>50</sup>.

The rebels had gone against the cardinal military doctrine of "absolute loyalty to the Crown"; it was, therefore, easy for the government and the conservative group of the armed forces to expose them in the eyes of the army. The various units of the security forces condemned the rebels and expressed their loyalty to the King and the new cabinet. These included: the Fourth Division and the Police of Eritrea on March 26<sup>51</sup>, unspecified brigades on March 27<sup>52</sup>, the Third Division and the Police of Harargue Province on March 30<sup>53</sup> and the Police of Kefa and Bale Provinces on April 2<sup>54</sup>.

In spite of the crackdown on the rebels, April, 1974, witnessed the most violent and disruptive disturbances, strikes and demonstrations of the whole uprising of that year. Each of the communities and organisations that came out in protest submitted petitions containing a lot of points - in some cases as many as thirty - but most of them were adamant on two of the demands (the dismissal of a number of their officials and the right to form trade unions). It appears that they were quite willing to give up their other demands if the two were met.

The demand for the dismissal of government officials was spearheaded by residents of provincial and sub-provincial capitals. Between March 29 and April 6, it was reported that there had been strikes and demonstrations in all of the provincial capitals with police actions against the demonstrators being at their severest in four of them: Jimma (Kefa)<sup>55</sup>, Metu (Ellibabur), Asela (Arusi) and Arbaminch (Gamo Gofa)<sup>56</sup>. In these four provincial capitals almost all of the adult male population - 300,000 people in Metu alone - seem to have come out onto the streets demanding the dismissal of their governor generals (heads of the provincial administration) and other officials allegedly because they were administratively incompetent, had evicted tenants and given the land away to friends in Addis Ababa and had misappropriated millions of dollars raised from the public for particular projects<sup>57</sup><sup>58</sup>. As a result of police brutalities against the demonstrators, two people were killed and eight wounded in Jimma, and a lot of people were beaten up in Metu and Arbaminch<sup>59</sup>, and in Asela 1514 people were arrested.

The Chamber of Deputies (the lower house of parliament) was incensed by the police actions in these and other provinces. For four days it held an extremely heated debate on the subject, and, on April 4, it decided that the government should investigate the police brutalities and punish those responsible and have the Auditor General audit the allegations concerning the misappropriation of funds by the officials<sup>60</sup>. The central government was in a dilemma; it could neither meet the demands overnight, as seems to have been the expectation of the people, nor use the police to quell the disturbances without provoking further opposition. Under pressure from the parliament and the growing momentum of the opposition, the government retreated; on April 8, it dismissed the governor generals of Sidamo and Arsi<sup>61</sup>, and on April 16, those of Shoa and Kefa<sup>62</sup>. On those two days no less than fourteen high officials were

appointed with many more to come soon after<sup>63</sup>, suggesting that the dismissals were much more extensive than was actually reported.

The disturbances, strikes and demonstrations of April, 1974, were not limited to the provincial people, but extended to residents of Addis Ababa, particularly those working for governmental and semi-governmental organisations. Almost all of them gave prominence to the demands of the dismissal of certain of their officials and of the right to form trade unions. For example, some 600 employees of the Ministry of Finance submitted twenty-two demands and, after several days of strike, went back to work on April 17, only because three of the Ministry's officials were dismissed in accordance with their request and because they were promised that their other demands would be met in due course<sup>64</sup>. Their demand for the right to form a trade union was denied them on the grounds that they were civil servants and as such could not properly establish a union under the law<sup>65</sup>. Similarly, the employees of the Ministries of Justice<sup>66</sup>, Agriculture<sup>67</sup> and Health<sup>68</sup> all made the dismissal of certain of their officials a requisite for resuming work.

More protracted and disruptive were the strikes and demonstrations of the service rendering governmental and semi-governmental agencies of Addis Ababa. Strikes by the employees of the Civil Aviation Agency, which started on March 11<sup>69</sup>, did not come to an end until April 1<sup>70</sup>. As a result, flights were held up until at least five of the agency's officials were dismissed<sup>71</sup>. The employees of the Addis Ababa Municipality went on strike for sixteen days until April 12, and managed to have the Mayor dismissed by the central government<sup>72</sup>. The danger to the city was such that on account of the accumulating tons of garbage, there was fear of cholera breaking out any time<sup>73</sup>. The capital city's only rail link with the outside world was cut off from April 6, to May 9, by the strike of the employees of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway Company<sup>74</sup>. Reportedly, the implications of the delivery

of food aid from the port of Djibouti to the interior and of armaments to the army in the eastern region of Harargue were very serious; nonetheless, the employees would not budge until at least thirteen of the company's officials were removed<sup>75</sup>. The public transport system of Addis Ababa was also disrupted intermittently between March 13<sup>76</sup>, and the beginning of May<sup>77</sup>, by the strike of the employees of the Lion Bus Company. On April 24, the city's taxis were stoned and the windows of many smashed. The bus drivers who sought to bring the entire transport system to a halt, and who actually managed to do so for a few days, were suspected of stoning the taxis. The employees of the company also demanded the dismissal of ten officials before they would consider going back to work at all<sup>78</sup>.

Further, the employees of the Telecommunications Board who had petitioned the government on March 11<sup>79</sup>, went on strike on April 30<sup>80</sup>, and resumed work only on June 5<sup>81</sup>. In spite of the fact that they had submitted a twenty-five point petition, they expressed their willingness to resume work if two of their demands were met - namely the dismissal of some of their officials and the right to form a trade union. On the question of the right to form a trade union, the employees of the Telecommunications Board were joined, on April 30, by the employees of seven other agencies. These included the employees of the Ethiopian Light and Power Authority, the Ethiopian Coffee Board, the Ethiopian Commercial Bank, the Highway Authority, the Addis Ababa Municipality, the Civil Aviation Agency and the Water and Sewerage Authority of Addis Ababa. The first four of these went on strike on the same day<sup>82</sup>. All of these agencies had been arguing for years that, as industrial or profit-making government agencies, the relevant law<sup>83</sup> could and should be interpreted to allow them to form trade unions. The trade union registering government department (the then Ministry of Community Development) rejected the

application of the employees of the telecommunications Board which had argued along these lines<sup>84</sup>.

It was by no means only employees of governmental, semi-governmental and private organisations that took part in the protest movement in April, but also religious and various other communities that poured out onto the streets of Addis Ababa and submitted petitions to the government. An outstanding example of this was the demonstration of the Muslim community and their Christian supporters on April 20, which brought out onto the streets over 100,000 people. In the biggest demonstrations of the protest movement, they demanded, through placards and chants, equal status for their religion<sup>85</sup>. Generally, the protest movement in April was so ubiquitous that in moments of flippancy the story was told that such peripheral communities, like the beggars and prostitutes, also demanded the doubling of alms to be received and payment for services rendered, and went on strike until such time as their demands were met<sup>86</sup>.

Part of the reason why Addis Ababans went on strikes and demonstrations quite unchallenged was because the army and the police were themselves involved in the protest movement of April. By the beginning of that month, they were starting to feel that the King's promises a month earlier to have the corrupt officials of Aklilou's cabinet tried by a court of law was going to remain unfulfilled. Further, when, on April 18, Endalkachew addressed some two hundred representatives of the armed forces in the Fourth Division, to ask them for their collaboration in the implementation of his cabinet's programmes, the one question that was asked again and again was why the members of Aklilou's government had not been placed under arrest and why they had not been punished?<sup>87</sup> Incidentally, the lower house of parliament also added its voice, on April 22, to the chorus of demands that members of the old cabinet be placed under arrest for their own safety, the country's

security and for facilitating the work of the new Cabinet<sup>88</sup>.

The security forces did not limit themselves to complaints; rather they took the law into their hands and started arresting the officials. On April 7, the armed forces and the police of Harague placed the local radio station and certain other government offices under their control and demanded the dismissal of Lt. Gen Haile Baykedgn, Second Commander of the Ground Forces, and Lt. Gen. Yilama Shibeshi, Commander of the Police Force. Lt. Gen Haile Baykedagn resigned the next day<sup>89</sup>.

These were isolated incidents, but the co-ordinating committee which surfaced by the last week of April in the Fourth Division, claiming to represent the Ground Forces, the Bodyguard, the Air Force, the Navy, the Police and various other units of the armed forces, started taking concentrated action against the officials. In what is usually referred to as "the second round of military uprising", the group placed under arrest Aklilou, members of his cabinet and their collaborators, in the last week of April<sup>90</sup>. What were referred to as "collaborators" were none other than the provincial governor generals, senior military and police officers and other high government officials of whom about two hundred were detained at the time<sup>91</sup>. On April 27, representatives of the group went to the King and expressed their allegiance to the Crown and to the new cabinet<sup>92</sup>. On the 29th, they declared that they had accomplished the task for which they had been established and retired to their barracks<sup>93</sup>.

Also, there may have been another committee calling itself the Co-ordinating Committee of the Armed Forces and the Police, led by Col. Alem-Zewd Tessema; this too seems to have emerged in the last week of April<sup>94</sup>. Even if the circumstances suggest that this was a separate committee from the previous one, it could, on the other hand, simply have been the conservative wing of the same committee. As Hagai Erlich suggests, it appears that

Endalkachew, with the help of Alem-Zewd's committee, used the upsurge of the military movement against the old officials who may have been conspiring against his cabinet while at the same time appeasing the protestors by collaborating in the arrest of the allegedly corrupt officials<sup>95</sup>.

In May and June, the protest movement started losing its momentum, mainly on account of the strong measures that the government was able to take with the assistance of the conservative officers. From the time of his appointment as Prime Minister, Endalkachew, in his public addresses, had been pleading for time to deal with the innumerable petitions, and time for the implementation of his cabinet's programmes. In April, his strategy was to evade the petitions which were submitted to his office by referring them to the relevant organisations where the disputes could be settled between the employees and the management, while, in the mean time buying time for himself to deal with the more pressing demands of the army.

In the last week of April, the government started threatening to rigorously enforce the law on strikes and demonstrations and to use the security forces against those who went on strikes and demonstrations without adhering to the procedures of the law. On April 23, for instance, the government resolved to take appropriate measures against industrial workers who went on strike outside the prescriptions of the law, civil servants who went on strike at all, and against those who went on demonstration except ↓

in accordance with the law and announced that the security forces had been authorized to enforce these decisions<sup>96</sup>. On April 30, the government issued a communiqué citing its decisions of April 23, and in pursuance of it, warned civil servant who were on strike that they would be replaced by new employees if they did not resume work immediately, and directed managers to keep a record of strict working hours<sup>97</sup>. On April 30,

the Ministry of Justice published, in the official newspaper, all the relevant Penal Code provisions against strikes and warned that they would be rigorously enforced as of then<sup>98</sup>. On May 3, the Ministry of Interior did the same with the laws on demonstrations and added new restrictions on them<sup>99</sup>.

From early on there was a half-hearted attempt to use the labour court in the then Ministry of Community Development to enforce these laws. It will be remembered that CELU, which represented a lot of the workers in the private sector, had called for a general strike by its members and that it was called off after four days of an effective strike (March 7 -11) because CELU had reached a seventeen point agreement with the central government. On March 18, the Employers Federation of Ethiopia applied to the Employer-Employee Board asking it to declare the general strike illegal and to find that the agreement reached between CELU and the central government did not bind the Employers' Federation. On April 20, the court decided in favour of the Employers' Federation on both counts and, in spite of the fact that the agreement between CLU and the government had provided that no reprisals would be taken against the workers who took part in the general strikes, it ruled that the workers would not be paid for the days they were on strike. CELU then declared the decision illegal and convened a meeting to consider what measures to take against it<sup>100</sup>.

The court's decisions did nothing to quell the rebellious mood of CELU. It continued to challenge the authority of the government so much that on April 30, the Ministry of Defence accused CELU of promoting lawlessness and strikes especially by civil servants and warned it to stop these illegal activities or face closure<sup>101</sup>. In its letter to the Prime Minister, CELU expressed its deep shock at the communiqué of the Ministry of defense, denied that it was promoting lawlessness, declared the warning illegal and asserted that threatening workers into submission would only damage the economy. Further,

it claimed that, since the armed forces shared the demands of the workers concerning living conditions and since they had time and again, sympathetically assisted the workers in promoting the same demands, they knew that CELU stood for the poor and that it was concerned about the country's progress<sup>102</sup>. The Prime Ministers' office took exception to the fact that CELU's letter was despatched to the local and international press before it was received by itself and pronounced that everyone including CELU was under the law<sup>103</sup>. Also, the labour court had occasion to entertain petitions from individual unions and employers<sup>104</sup>, but its decisions were not effective since the parties continued to challenge them.

More effective than the law courts in quelling the strikes was what was called the High National Security Commission, which was probably created by the Minister of Defence (Gen. Abiye) behind the back of Endalkachew. According to Endalkachew, the commission was a revival of the Military and Police Joint Command which was established by him two months earlier so as to uphold law and order and which was dissolved later as the security situation improved. Further, he explained that the differences between the two were that the jurisdiction of the Joint Command was limited to the capital city whereas that of the Commission extended to the rest of the country as well and that the composition of the Joint Command was limited to the members of the army and the police whereas that of the Commission included civilians as well. Despite this acknowledgement of the commission by Endalkachew, Gilkes points out that the latter took it as a ploy of Abiye to overthrow him<sup>105</sup>.

Of the cases dealt with by the Commission, that of the Telecommunications Board was most striking. On May 16, the employees of that agency submitted a twenty-five point petition to the commission and asked it to deal with some of the points and leave the rest to be dealt with by the management of the Board. The Commission then held a number of meetings with the representatives of the

employees in which the one question of the dismissal of certain of the agency's officials became extremely controversial. The Commission took the position that individual rights cannot be deprived without due process of law; the representatives of employees on the other had argued that since the demand was that of the majority, the Commission should enforce it without asking for evidence to prove the guilt of officials concerned. On May 25, the representatives of the Employees held a meeting of all the workers of the Board and communicated the decisions of the Commission to it. Representatives of the Commission who were also attending the meeting felt that the decisions were misrepresented and tried to stop the meeting unsuccessfully. At the end of the meeting, the Commission had twenty-four of the employees arrested and the rest dispersed by force<sup>106</sup>. After the government brought further pressure to bear on the employees<sup>107</sup>, they all resumed work on June 6 with the sole demand now that their colleagues under arrest be released.

A further example of the Commission's activities is its intervention in the dispute between the employees and officials of the General Post Office. On May 2, the employees of that agency locked out seven of their officials. Since the employees had done this once before and since on that occasion soldiers sent by the Commission opened the offices of the officials and let them in, the employees responsible for this second lock-out were placed under arrest, but released on the next day because the arrest led to a general strike of protest by all the employees of the General Post Office<sup>108109</sup>. Further, the Commission conducted a series of consultations with the Ministry of Education, teachers, students and parents and, on May 11, it published in the official newspaper the decisions it arrived at. It hoped that the decisions would lead to the re-opening of the schools which were shut as a result of student class boycotts<sup>110</sup>, but all in vain.

If the role of the Commission in these cases looked ineffective, its authority was nevertheless, being recognized by other agencies. On June 17, the Diabaco Cotton Spinning Factory was closed and both employees and employers petitioned the Commission accusing each other of being responsible for the closure<sup>111</sup>. On June 23, the employers were able to dismiss on hundred and fourteen workers and to keep forty full-time employees of the factory out of work until their cases were resolved<sup>112</sup>, measures that would have been undreamt of but two months earlier. By June, the urban uprising had begun to thaw.

### CONCLUSION

What is clear from the preceding pages is that the rural populations of Ethiopia were not involved in the uprising which prevailed over the first six months of 1974. Despite that, leftist observers of the events have maintained that the peasant had always been involved in insurrectionary protests against the exploiting class and continued to do so during the uprising under consideration. In support of their claim, they often cite the armed struggle of the Oromo in Bale from 1960-1970, the 1967 resistance of the farmers of the north-western province of Gojam against tax reforms, and the thousands of farmers (mostly tenants) who were dislodged from their holdings as a result of the development of commercial farms in several areas as of the late 1960's.

However, the Bale resistance involved all classes of the area and was based more on ethnic and religious considerations than anything else; further, it was led by an organized elite helped and abetted by the Republic of Somalia. Also, in the Gojam resistance, all the upper and lower classes took a common position against the government attempts to measure their holdings for the purpose of tax evaluations because, they feared, the measurement was a government ploy to introduce land reform in the region. Further, the peasants displaced

from the commercial farms left their holdings sheepishly and the bulk of them became wage labours in the neighbouring farms and towns, or joined the pool of the unemployed there. The fact remains that there is no evidence to show that the peasants of the north or those of the south ever acted either independently or except for those in Bale as part of an organised political movement. Moreover, there is no evidence to show that they behaved any differently in the uprising of 1974. Their mobilization and absorption into the political life of the country did not take place until later.

In fact, the revolutionary credentials of the Ethiopian peasantry compared poorly to that of the nomads whom the literature on Ethiopia have on the whole ignored. As argued earlier, the nomads of the Sahel plains in Eritrea and those of the Ogaden had, since about 1960, been involved in armed resistance against the ancien regime. Like the Oromos of Bale, the resistance of these nomads was primarily based on religious and ethnic considerations and was led by an organized élite with substantial international support. Though the general literature on the revolutionary potential of nomads leaves a lot to be desired, the Ethiopian experience seems to suggest that the nomads can be as revolutionary as the peasants if not more. Be that as it may, despite the fact that the nomads had struggled for a long time and may well have contributed to the decline of the ancien regime, they did not play any role in the uprising of 1974 which was quite outside their reach.

As the topic of this chapter suggests, the uprising of 1974 was based on the "urban" residents who numbered about 3 million out of a total population of almost 32 million. Of these, it was only the civil servants, industrial workers, the army and the students who took an active part in the protest movement. The total number of civil servants was 100,000 about a third of whom were employed in the state owned or dominated enterprises; the employees of some of the state owned or dominated

enterprises like the Ethiopian Air Lines were allowed to form trade unions but most were not. The Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions, which included the employees of the state owned enterprises which could form unions, had a total membership of about 80 thousand. The Ethiopian Teachers' Association whose members were civil servants was 18 thousand strong. In addition to the civil servants, there was the army of 55 thousand including the ten thousand territorial army in active force and a police force of about 30 thousand. The number of enrolled school students was about 70 thousand and that of the university six thousand. Thus, out of the total urban population of 3 million, the politically active group made up of civil servants, workers, the soldiers and students was less than 300,000; the rest of the urban residents were either self-employed, part of the informal economy, or unemployed and hence, dependent on those who earned their living from the formal and informal sectors.

In early March, the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions called for a general strike by its members; the government gave in to all the demands of the Confederation and the strike was called off within a few days. Following that, the headquarters of the Confederation became the focal point at which a lot of the demonstrations by all interest groups (including those that were not members of the Confederation) started and or ended. This was mainly due to the activists within the interest groups who, because of their ideological leanings, sought to give the workers a leading role in the uprising and encouraged the demonstrators to go to the headquarters of the Confederation. The headquarters had become the focus of the demonstrations so much that in April the government was forced to accuse the Confederation of instigating all the demonstrations and strikes and warned it to stop such activities or face closure.

Despite this, there are considerations that make the active participation of the working class in the popular uprising of 1974 questionable. First, the members of the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions were university or school graduates and, hence, part of the petit bourgeois intellectual substratum; in other words, they were not a product of the industrial work force who got to their position by dirtying their hands with labour or the production belt. Second, the industrial workers of the individual enterprises, as opposed to their national Confederation which held only one general strike in the six months of social upheaval, were involved in strikes and lockouts of employers only in a handful of cases and even then for only a few days in each case. By contrast, the strikes and demonstrations of quite a number of the government agencies like the Civil Aviation Agency, the Telecommunications, and the Municipality of Addis Ababa were much more protracted, lasting for months on end.

It is believed that the civilian left and the army competed for the vanguardship of the urban uprising of 1974 much more than the industrial workers. The civilian left had at its disposal the University Students Union of Addis Ababa with the help of which it organised the university and school students to boycott classes, hold rallies and go out on demonstrations for the duration of the uprising. The influence of the civilian left was not limited to the students but also extended to the employees of the government and semi-government agencies which were embroiled in the uprising. The school and university graduates who were working for these government and semi-government agencies managed to dominate the steering committees that sprang up in those agencies in the course of the uprising. The functions of the steering committees were presiding over the general meetings of the employees of their respective agencies, writing petitions to the government, preparing papers and placards for the public, and organising strikes and demonstrations. The civilian left played an active role

in all this not as affiliates of any political organisation but as individuals. At the time there was an underground organisation called Abiyot (Revolution) which was based among the civilian left; however, as opposed to its counterparts abroad, it was completely inept and played a minimal role in the uprising if at all.

Equally important, if not more so, was the role played by the security forces in the uprising of 1974. Their units also had steering committees which led the discussions concerning the mood of the protest movement among the civilian population, wrote petitions to the government, prepared papers for distribution to the public, and generally considered what measures to take. As it happened, the measures they took in exacting concessions from the government and in arresting the officials of the ancien regime were much more effective for the "success" of the uprising than any of the measures taken by the civilian population. In a sense, the uprising could be seen as a competition between the state and the civilian population to win over the security forces to one side or the other; as it happened, the security forces erred on the side of supporting the protest movement. It is doubtful if the uprising would have persisted had it not been for this fact.

Despite their numerical insignificance compared to the rest of the population, the politically active elite managed to hold the ancien regime to ransom. The explanation for this must be sought in the crisis of the ancien regime itself, in Haile Selassie's government and in the cabinets of Aklilou and Endalkachew. As argued in the previous chapter, Haile Selassie's autocracy had not only been buffeted and discredited by internal and external opposition but also its head, the monarch, had become too old and senile to employ even his old skills effectively. Since the early 20th century, Haile Selassie had been riding waves of mutinies and public protests by blaming his officials for things that had

gone wrong in the government and by compromising the positions of his officials by way of concessions to the protestors. In 1974, he followed a similar strategy: not only did he sacrifice Aklilou's cabinet in the hope of appeasing the security forces but also told his officials not to resist arrests by the army and to trust him to be able ride the wave of the protest movement once again. However, the mutinies and protests of 1974 had an unprecedently wide social base; they were too deep rooted to be managed by anyone let alone the monarch whose senility had given rise to a power vacuum in that year.

That Haile Selassie had left a power vacuum was obvious more to his officials than to anyone else. The monarch's monopoly of power had left them without any power base in the society including the army and had, further, rendered them too weak and divided to replace him. Those of the ministers who attempted to fill in the vacuum only managed to trip over each other and fall together. The February "resignation" of Aklilou's cabinet was no doubt a result of the demand of an NCO committee of the time; however, there is evidence to show that Endalkachew who had an eye to the prime ministerial position had a hand in instigating the demand, in influencing the monarch's appointment of a prime minister in his favour, and in bringing about the arrest in April of hundreds of the officials including members of Aklilou's cabinet. Members of Endalkachew's cabinet were more from an aristocratic stock than their predecessors; as some of the pamphlets of the time indicated, this was incongruent with the populist spirit of the popular uprising. Be that as it may, Endalkachew's cabinet could not hold together. Endalkachew's bid to become prime minister was contested by Lt. Gen. Abiye Abebe who was merely appointed Minister of Defence. However, the competition between the two continued, leading in March to the establishment of Alem Zewd's committee by Endalkachew for the purpose of

coordinating the security forces, and in May to the establishment of the National Security Commission by Abiye for the same purpose. Though these were admirable attempts at building a power base within the army, they were at the same time directed against one aristocratic group by another with spill overs to the security forces which almost resulted in an armed confrontation among them. The uprising of January to June, 1974, was limited to the urban areas. However, this was sufficient to completely disorientate the ancien regime which, because of its already weakened position in the society, was unable to deal with it.

In effect, what the events of January to June, 1974, show is the total collapse of the ancien regime and the absence of any obvious successor to it.

## FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. Erlich, H., "The Establishment of the Derg: the Turning of a Protest Movement into a Revolution", Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies, Session B, ed. Robert L. Hess, April 13-16, 1978, p. 786.
2. Under the prevailing system an organisation, a group or an individual could petition the monarch almost on any matter they chose.
3. See note 1 above p. 787.
4. "A communiqué Issued to Explain the Week's Developments", Addis Zemen, No. 342, Feb 24, 1974. Addis Zemen was and is the most important daily paper of the Ethiopian government. The present chapter draws a lot of its information from it because the paper is, by and large, an untapped source of a wealth of data, it is much more detailed than its English equivalent (The Ethiopian Herald) and because it was, at the time under consideration, quite free to publish anything on account of the fact that the censorship machinery was not functional. The title of the articles one translated into English and the Ethiopian calendar converted into the Gregorian calendar by the author.
5. "Teachers Want Negotiations with the Government", Addis Zemen, No. 352, March 13, 1974.
6. "An Explanation Given By the Ministry of Education Concerning the Sector Review", Addis Zemen, No. 330, February 8, 1974.
7. "Prime Minister Gives an Explanation Concerning Teachers", Addis Zemen, No. 350, March 7, 1974.
8. "An Explanation Issued by the Ministry of Interior", Addis Zemen, No. 340, February 22, 1974; and "An explanation Issued by the Head of Police", Addis Zemen, No. 341, February 23, 1974.
9. "A Year Ago Today; from a Diary", Addis Zemen, No. 641, February 21, 1975.
10. "A Year Ago Today; from a Diary", Addis Zemen, No. 642, February 22, 1975.
11. "From Memory; around Markato", Addis Zemen, No. 642, February 22, 1975.

12. See Note 4 above.
13. See Note 8 above.
14. See Note 4 above
15. Ibid, and "An Explanation Given by the Ministry of Trade Concerning Petrol Prices", Addis Zemen, No. 342, February 24, 1974.
16. "From Memory; a Taxi Driver", Addis Zemen, No. 641, February 21, 1975.
17. "His Imperial Majesty Gives an Order Concerning Pay Increases for the Armed Forces", Addis Zemen, No. 343, February 26, 1974.
18. Martini, D., The Observer, cited by Erlich, H. See note 1 above.
19. "His Majesty the Emperor Gives Directions to the Armed Forces", Addis Zemen, No. 345, February 1974.
20. Scholler, H. and Brietzke, P., Ethiopia: Revolution, Law and Politics, Welforum Verlage Munchen, 1976, Appendix G II, p. 139.
21. See Note 19 above.
22. "His Majesty Accepts, with good will the Petition of the Members of the Armed Forces in Asmara", Addis Zemen, No. 345, February 28, 1974.
23. "His Majesty's Address to his Subjects", Addis Zemen, No. 346, March 1, 1974.
24. "A Communiqué Issued by the Palace", Addis Zemen, No. 345, February, 28, 1974.
25. See Note 23 above.
26. See Note 1 above p. 789.
27. "The Armed Forces Express their Allegiance to His Majesty", Addis Zemen, No. 347, March 2, 1974.
28. See Note 1 above, p. 787.
29. "The New Prime Minister Gives an Explanation", Addis Zemen, No. 346, March 1974.
30. "Answers of the Prime Minister to Questions by Journalists", Addis Zemen, No. 435, June 18, 1974.

31. According to Order No. 44 of 1966, members of the Cabinet were to be nominated by the Prime Minister and presented to the King for his approval. This made the question of Lt. General Abiy Abebe's direct appointment by the King as Minister of Defence of doubtful validity.
32. "Members of the New Cabinet take oath of Office", Addis Zemen, No. 348, March 5, 1974.
33. "Five Ministers Take Oath of Office", Addis Zemen, No. 363, March 23, 1974.
34. See Note 27 above.
35. "Schools Open Today", Addis Zemen, No. 358, March 20, 1974, and "All Ethiopian Schools Resume Work", Addis Zemen, No. 361, March 21, 1974.
36. See for example: "Students of Addis Ababa have not resumed classes", Addis Zemen, No. 391, April 26, 1974; and "Teachers of Addis Ababa express their Opinion on the Resumption of Classes", Addis Zemen, No. 414, May 24, 1974.
37. "A Committee to Study the General Situation of Prisoners Established", Addis Zemen, No. 349, March 6, 1974.
38. "The Workers Resume Work after Four Days of Strike", Addis Zemen, 351, March 12 1974.
39. "The Employees of the Ethiopian Civil Aviation Agency Say that they Will Resume Work if Two Officials Are Dismissed", Addis Zemen, 366, March 27, 1974.
40. "The Ethiopian Airlines Resume Partial Service", Addis Zemen, No. 363, March 14, 1974.
41. "The Tobacco Monopoly Loses Birr 150,000 on account of a Day and a Half's Strike", Addis Zemen, No. 355, March 16, 1974.
42. "The Church's Teachers Meet to Demand Pay Increases", Addis Zemen, No. 362, March 22, 1974.
43. "Priests Submit Demands for Pay Increases", Addis Zemen, No. 352, March 13, 1974.
44. "Employees of the Municipality Submit a Twenty Three Point Demand", Addis Zemen, No. 361, March 24, 1974.

45. "The Northern Forces Express their Objection to Rumour-mongers; Members of the Northern Forces and Representatives of the Employers Confederation Remind Teachers to Resume Work", Addis Zemen, No. 353, March 14, 1974.
46. "The Ministry of Interior Issues a Communiqué", Addis Zemen, No. 355, March 16, 1974.
47. See Note 20 above.
48. The account of the plot is related by a private who claims to have been involved in it.
49. "The Armed Forces Guard the Asmara Radio Station and Airport", Addis Zemen, No. 336, March 27, 1974.
50. "The Ministry of Defense Issue a Communiqué", Addis Zemen, No. 371, April 2, 1974.
51. See Note 49 above.
52. "The Divisions of the Armed Forces Issue a Communique", Addis Zemen, No. 370, March 31, 1974.
53. "The Hararghe Third Division and Police Affirm their Allegiance to His Majesty", Addis Zemen, No. 370, March 31, 1974.
54. "The Police of Kefa and Bale Express their Allegiance to His Majesty", Addis Zemen, No. 371, April 2, 1974.
55. "The People of Jima Demand the Appointment 'for them' of Honest People of Goodwill", Addis Zemen, No. 368, March 29, 1974.
56. "Parliament's Discussions of Yesterday Morning", Addis Zemen, No. 371, April 2, 1974.
57. "The People of Elibabar Demand the Appointment 'for them' of People of Goodwill; the Students of Gondar and Wolame Submit a Petition", Addis Zemen, No. 372, April 3, 1974.
58. Ibid.
59. See Notes 55 and 56 above.
60. "Parliament Decides the Auditing of Publicly Raised Funds", Addis Zemen, No. 375, April 6, 1974.
61. "Self-congratulatory Demonstration Held in Assella", Addis Zemen, No. 379, April 11, 1974.

62. "Appointments", Addis Zemen, No. 383, April 17, 1974.
63. "Appointments", Addis Zemen, No. 391, April 26, 1974.
64. "Employees of the Ministry of Finance Resume Work; Three Officials are Dismissed", Addis Zemen, No. 383, April 17, 1974.
65. "A Decision Concerning the Employees of the Ministry of Finance", Addis Zemen, No. 382, April 14, 1974.
66. "Employees of the Ministry of Justice Submit a Petition", Addis Zemen, No. 385, April 19, 1974.
67. "Employees of the Ministry of Agriculture Submit a Petition", Addis Zemen, No. 391, April 26, 1974.
68. "The Ministry of Health Gives a reply to the Demands of the Nurses", Addis Zemen, No. 425, June 6, 1974.
69. "Employees of the Civil Aviation Agency Say They Will Resume Work if Five Officials are Dismissed", Addis Zemen, No. 366, March 27, 1974.
70. "Employees of the Civil Aviation Agency Resume Work", Addis Zemen, No. 371, April 2, 1974.
71. See Note 69 above.
72. "An Acting Mayor Appointment for Addis Ababa", Addis Zemen, No. 380, April 12, 1974; and "Employees of the Municipality are Cleaning the City without Rest", Addis Zemen, No. 381, April 13, 1974.
73. "The is Fear of a Communicable Disease Breaking out in Addis Ababa", Addis Zemen, No. 376, April 7, 1974.
74. "All the Employees of the Railway will Resume Work Tomorrow", Addis Zemen, No. 400, May 7, 1974.
75. "The Employees of the Railway Say that they Will Resume Work if Two Demands Are Met", Addis Zemen, No. 390, April 25, 1974.
76. "The Employees of the Bus Company Say that they will Not Resume Work Unless Ten Officials Are Dismissed", Addis Zemen, No. 377, April 9, 1974.

77. "The Lion Bus Resumes Work", Addis Zemen, No. 396, May 2, 1974.
78. See Note 76 above.
79. "Employees of the Telecommunications Demand the Recognition of the Union", Addis Zemen, No. 389, April 24, 1974.
80. "Employees of the Telecommunication and the Power Authority said to be Planning to go on Strike", Addis Zemen, No. 394, April 30, 1974.
81. "The Employees of the Telecommunications Resume Work", Addis Zemen, No. 425, June 6, 1974.
82. "Employees of Five Agencies Go on Strike, Claiming that they were Not Allowed to Establish Unions", Addis Zemen, No. 395, May 1, 1974.
83. Article 2 (5) of the Proclamation No. 210 of 1963.
84. See note 79 above.
85. "Ethiopian Moslems Hold a Big Demonstration in Addis Ababa", Addis Zemen, No. 387, April 21, 1974.
86. "To Pawlos Gnogno", Addis Zemen, No. 396, May 2, 1974, p.8.
87. "The Armed Forces have Responsibility to Help in the Completion of the Work", Addis Zemen, No. 385, April 19, 1974.
88. "The Ministers of the Old Government Isolated", Addis Zemen, No. 392, April 27, 1974.
89. "Lt. General Haile Bay Kedagn Resigns his Position", Addis Zemen, No. 377, April 9, 1974.
90. "The Province Ministers Placed under Arrest in order to Ensure the Country's Peace and Security; they will be held Answerable not only for Unlawful Enrichment but also for Maladministration", Addis Zemen, No. 393, April 28, 1974.
91. See note 1 above p. 791.
92. "Members of the Armed Forces Explain to his Majesty the Aim of the Measures they Took", Addis Zemen, No. 393, April 28, 1974.

93. "The Armed Forces and Police Committee Returns to its Regular Functions", Addis Zemen, No. 394, April 30, 1974.
94. See note 90 above.
95. See note 1 above p. 791.
96. "An Explanation by the Government", Addis Zemen, No. 389, April 24, 1974.
97. "Government Gives a Warning to Strikers", Addis Zemen, No. 394, April 30, 1974.
98. "An Explanation by the Ministry of defence; the Ministry of Justice also Issues an Explanation regarding Sanctions that Result from Illegal Stoppage from Work", Addis Zemen, No. 395, May 1, 1974.
99. "A Ministry of Interior's Directive concerning Demonstrations", Addis Zemen, No. 397, May 3, 1974.
100. "The General Strike of Workers is Declared Illegal; No Payment for the Days the Workers did not Work", Addis Zemen, No. 389, April 24, 1974.
101. See note 98 above.
102. "C.E.L.U. Denies having Committed an Offence", Addis Zemen, No. 398, May 4 1974.
103. "An Elaboration Grows by the Prime Minister's Office", Addis Zemen, No. 399, May 5 1974.
104. "Lazardis Locks out 1,400 Workers and Closes Factory", Addis Zemen, No. 419, May 30, 1974, "The Board Gives its Decision on the Case of Lasardis' Employees", Addis Zemen, No. 424, June 5, 1974, and "The Thread Company Closes Indefinitely", Addis Zemen, No. 433, June 15, 1974.
105. See note 30 above; and Pliny the Middle-Aged, "The PMAC: Origins and Structure Part I", Africanist Notes, Vol. I, p.5.
106. "The Security Commission Examines the Petition of the Telecommunication's Employees and Gives an Explanation", Addis Zemen, No. 418, May 29, 1974.
107. See for example, "A Warning Given by the Telecommunications", Addis Ababa, No. 423,

June 4, 1974; and "Employees of the Telecommuni-cations Requested to Resume Work", Addis Zemen, No. 424, June 5, 1974.

108. "The Employees of the Telecommunications Resume Work in Full Force", Addis Zemen, No. 426, June 7, 1974.
109. "The Postal Service, which was Interrupted for Half a Day Resumes Work", Addis Zemen, No. 398, May 4, 1974.
110. "The High National Security Commission Gives a Decision Concerning the Question of Students", Addis Zemen, No. 404, May 11, 1974.
111. "The Employees of the Diabacco Cotton-Spinning Factory go on Strike", Addis Zemen, No. 410, May 19, 1974.
112. "The Diabacco Cotton-Spinning Factory Resumes Work", Addis Zemen, No. 441, June 25, 1974.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Turning of an Urban Movement into a Junta Dictatorship

#### (A) The Emergence of the Derg

In the organisations in which the members had unions or associations, the task of co-ordinating the demands, strikes and demonstrations of February - June, 1974, fell on the democratically elected leaders and committees. Examples of these were the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU), the Ethiopian Teachers Association and the University Student's Union of Addis Ababa. In the other organisations, spontaneous committees sprung up in the course of the movement and took on the task of co-ordinating the protest activities in their respective organisations. Also, in some of the provincial capitals, notably in Jimma (Kefa), committees made up of similar corporate groups went as far as temporarily occupying the local administrations and setting themselves up as popular governments, albeit for a short time. Needless to say, the most active in all these committees were the radical left.

According to Lefort, the emergence of Co-ordinating Committees within the army goes as far back as late 1973 when, what he calls 'Army Mess Committees' started compiling lists of strictly corporatist grievances, at the instigation of senior officers who sought to create discontentment among the army against the Prime Minister (Aklilou Habte-Wolde).<sup>1</sup> By the end of February, 1974, highly politicised unit co-ordinating committees were established at least in the Air-Force and in the First, Second and Fourth Divisions<sup>2</sup> and spread to the remaining units thereafter. The military-police co-ordinating committees (like the ones that emerged in February and April) were different from what we have called 'the unit

co-ordinating committees' in that they purported to represent all or most of the units instead of individual ones. Finally, the Military-Police Joint Command of late February (created by Endalkachew) and the High National Security Commission of late April (created by Abiye) were different from the others in that they were not established by the armed forces and the police but by the government in order to arrest the tide of the movement.

The Military-Police Joint Command and the High National Security Commission were essentially pro-status quo; with the help of the moderates in the other committees, they tried to stabilise Endalkachew's cabinet. On the other hand, the radicals in the unit co-ordinating committees and the military police co-ordinating committees sought to destabilise the government, as they managed to do during the first and second military uprisings of late February and April when the civilian protest movement seemed to have the upper hand. Even if it was clear that power had fallen into the hands of the armed forces in the course of the movement, they were unable to take any decisive measures because of the continuously changing balance of power between the moderates and the radicals among these groups.

In May and June, 1974, the High National Security Commission, chaired by the Minister of Defence (Lt. General Abiye Abebe), weakened the movement by interceding in disputes between the employees and management and, when necessary, by the use and threat of force. Needless to say, its decisions were enforced by the lower ranking officers, NCO's and privates. In this, the radical members of the military-police co-ordinating committees found they were acting against the very civilian and military activists with whom they had identified themselves time and again. More important, perhaps, was the fact that in the aftermath of the 1960 abortive coup d'état, the rebels in the First Division (the Bodyguard) were executed, imprisoned or dismissed from the army for treason and related offences. The

radicals of the 1974 movement feared that a similar fate might befall them for having been involved in mutinies and incarceration of the government officials, should the High National Security Commission succeed in reinstating the ancien regime. Spurred by considerations like this, the activists, at least, in Addis Ababa, continued to hold informal meetings wherever they could: private houses, the wooded outskirts of the capital, churchyards and the like. The purpose of these meetings was to try and promote discontent among members of the armed forces by pointing out to them that the detainees, instead of being treated like criminals, had their families visit them freely and provide them with sumptuous meals and glorious birthday parties while millions were starving as a result of the drought. In this way, the military radicals and the civilian militants who were able to take part in these activities managed to keep the spirit of the movement alive within the armed forces.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently, the Government, with the assistance of the moderates in the army, had arrested or sent to remote areas some of the radical members of the military-police co-ordinating committee, after the first and second rounds of the military uprisings. Some of the others, particularly those who came from Addis Ababa, and Debre-Zeit, survived the arrest and banishments<sup>4</sup> and continued to struggle. Endalkachew unwittingly helped the armed forces organise themselves; seeing his downfall in the success of the National Security Commission's quelling of the uprising, he went to the various units and told them to put their house in order. According to Hagai Erlich, some twelve to sixteen of these radicals decided to form their own Co-ordinating Committee in early June 1974.<sup>5</sup> The committee was laid by a Major Atnafu Abate from the Fourth Division and by Major Tefera Tekle-ab of army engineers; other members of the committee included aircraftsman Girma Fisiha, Major Tibebu, Major Genetu, Major Sisay Habte, and Major Fisiha Desta.<sup>6</sup> This marks the beginning of the third round of

the military uprising which proved more decisive than the first two.

The third round of the uprising drew its strength not from another upsurge of civilian unrest but from an ability to co-ordinate the armed forces in and around Addis Ababa through the exploitation of the grievances of the veterans of U.N. military operations in Korea and the Congo, in 1951 and 1960 respectively. These veterans were led to believe that the government had paid them only part of what the U.N. had assigned for them and misappropriated the rest. Earlier on they had petitioned the government for a remedy in vain. In June 1974, they, at the instigation of Endalkachew, appealed to the king against the Ministry of Defence (Abiye) only to be told to go and see Endalkachew. In their frustration and apparently with the encouragement of Endalkachew the leaders of the veterans turned to the radicals and, with Major Atnafu's co-ordinating committee, started promoting discontent among the armed forces of Addis Ababa and the surrounding areas.<sup>7</sup> Once again, the balance had tipped in favour of the radicals.

The only task that remained to be accomplished by Major Atnafu's Co-ordinating Committee was the bringing of the provincial military units within the orbit of the movement. Accordingly, the committee promoted among them the idea that the purpose of the then movement was to arrest and bring to justice the officials of the ancien regime who were still at large. By then, the popular presumption within the army was that the officials were guilty of corruption and were responsible for the backwardness of the country and that the Investigation Commission was too inept to accomplish its task. By mid-June, 1974, the bulk of the provincial units were apparently aware of the existence of the Co-ordinating Committee.<sup>8</sup>

By all accounts, the last straw seems to have been when, on June 26, two groups of M.P.'s (one led by an Ato Kagnev Kitachew and the other by a Major Admasse Zelleke)

went to the Fourth Division and addressed the soldiers there about the detained officials. The first group advocated the continued detention of the officials while the second pleaded for their release on bail.<sup>9</sup> The emotive appeal of Ato Kagnev greatly aroused members of the Co-ordinating Committee which took advantage of the occasion and called upon the soldiers there to take up arms and be on the ready to come out of their barracks and arrest the old officials.<sup>10</sup> Major Admasses's group was roundly condemned as having been instigated by the officials of the ancien regime.<sup>11</sup> Lt. General Abiye who still believed to have been in control of the armed forces and who was planning to make a move against the Co-ordinating Committee is thought to have been behind Major Admasse's intercession.<sup>12</sup>

According to some sources it was at this juncture (June 26, 1974) that Major Altnafu's Co-ordinating Committee sent telegrams to the provincial military and police units asking them to delegate three representatives each in order to participate in the leadership of the movement or that Major Tefera captured the radio station on behalf of the Co-ordinating Committee and broadcasted the same message to the provincial units.<sup>13</sup> However, considering the speed at which the Committee was able to hold a general meeting and to start acting, it is more logical to assume that the involvement of the provincial unit was invoked earlier on; according to Hagai Erlich for instance, some thirty-five to forty of the military units were invited to send such representatives by the middle of June.<sup>14</sup> On June 28, the bulk of the delegates were assembled in the headquarters of the Fourth Division (Addis Ababa). Some, like the ground forces, the Air-Force, the Navy and the Police of the Second Division (Eritrea) did not send their delegates until July 5<sup>15</sup> and still others until later. The publicised number of the final membership of the Co-ordinating Committee was a hundred and twenty - a figure which apparently included the clerical staff of

the Committee - but the actual number of representatives was a hundred and six.

The decision to ask the units to send three delegates each was in order to have an equal representation of the junior officers up to and including majors, NCO's and privates, which suggests that the body so created was composed roughly in that proportion. The senior officers were excluded because they were identified with the ancien regime. Thus, on June 28, 1974, was created what was then called the Co-ordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, the Police and the Territorial Army<sup>16</sup> and later variously as the Armed Forces Committee, the Provisional Military Administrative Council, the Provisional Military Government, or simply as the Derg (the committee).

**(B) 'The Creeping Coup' (June 28 - September 12 1974).**

Major Atnafu was, perhaps, elected Chairman of the Co-ordinating Committee soon after the Provincial Military Units expressed in the middle of June, their willingness to collaborate with the third round of military uprisings.<sup>17</sup> On the very first day of the Derg's plenum (June 28) which was chaired by Major Atnafu Abate of the Fourth Division, the leadership question was raised again. A group within the Derg called upon the assembly not to waste its time by discussing the fate of the officials under arrest and those still at large, but to focus on the questions of adopting 'wise' leadership and of rising to the challenge of the time and living up to the expectations of the movement. On the next day, the leadership question came to the forefront and, after some tense discussions, Major Mengistu Haile-Mariam of the Third Division, was elected chairman, Major Atnafu Abate Vice-Chairman and Major Gebreges Welde-Hana Secretary-General of the Derg.<sup>18</sup> It appears that the stirring-up of the leadership question among these delegates, most of whom did not know one another, and

also the outcome of the elections, was a result of personal ambitions and diplomacy in the corridors of the Fourth Division.

The appointment of the non-Derg member, Lt. General Aman Andom, as the chairman of the Derg was announced officially on September 13, 1974 as though it was made on the previous day,<sup>19</sup> whereas in actual fact it seems to have been made on June 30, 1974.<sup>20</sup> His credentials could only have strongly recommended him to the Derg: he was involved in the activities of the radical wing of the Military-Police Co-ordinating Committee starting from its inception<sup>21</sup>; he was popular with the army in general; he had, behind him, long years of experience in governmental affairs: as an Eritrean he could be expected to diffuse the Eritrean secessionist demand; and, he was an acknowledged hero in the fight against the Republic of Somalia, which had territorial ambitions over Ethiopia. From early July on, Lt. General Aman started acting as Head of State, receiving Ambassadors and other foreign dignitaries on behalf of the state.<sup>22</sup> Be that as it may, the effect of Lt. General Aman's appointment on the ordering of the leadership was to make Major Mengistu First Vice-Chairman and Major Atnafu Abate second Vice-Chairman of the Derg.

At the same time as it was considering the question of leadership, the Derg was trying to define the purpose for which it was established. As noted earlier the purpose for its establishment was to detain the officials of the ancien regime, allegedly because they were obstructing the work of the new cabinet of Endalkachew, and bring them to justice alongside their colleagues already in prison. The need to co-ordinate the armed forces and avoid bloodshed among them appears to have been the other purpose of its formation. At any rate, once the Derg was assembled, the more radical elements within it considered these considerations too mundane a target for such a representative body to dwell on, and started whipping up the emotion of its members with a

view to rallying support for a more radical stance. Reminiscing about the first three days of the Derg's general meetings some thirteen years later, Major Mengistu Haile-Mariam <sup>23</sup> said that it seemed as though 'fire' was coming out of the mouths of the speakers when they were making speeches about the backwardness of Ethiopia, its history, the suffering of its people and the progress made in other countries. The small, round room in the Fourth Division where they met, he said, was gradually becoming charged with emotion until finally it reached a climax and exploded with scenes of war songs and declarations of readiness to die 'Not the death of a dog but that of a lion' in the course of liberating the Ethiopian people from oppression. On the third day (June 30) they took an oath never to see the suffering and humiliation of the Ethiopian people again and to remain united to the point of death.<sup>24</sup> According to a Derg report, of September 1975, they actually swore an oath "In the name of the living God" not to betray the secrets of the Derg.

One of the spin-offs of all this was the adoption of a policy statement called 'Ethiopia First', which was announced on July 4 <sup>25</sup>, the contents of which were published on July 10. <sup>26</sup> Various referred to by the Derg as its motto, slogan, philosophy, principle, ideology etc., 'Ethiopia First' had thirteen sections, most of which related to the issues of the time. Examples of this are: allegiance to the King and Crown, Cabinet reform, the trial of the corrupt and inept officials, speedy implementation of the draft constitution, close collaboration with the cabinet, the continuation of humanitarian aid to the drought affected people, foreign aid from friendly countries in general and expansion of tourism. The other points reflect the Derg's long-term strategy: protection of rights for the entire people, quick development of the people, modern legislation on employer-employee relations, modernisation of the traditional beliefs that obstruct the development and

unity of the country, increased participation by the people in the development process, betterment and modern civilization on the basis of nationalism and equality rather than on the basis of the age old discrimination along national and religious lines, and the conviction that the movement of the armed forces and police would result in change without blood-shed which would be possible because of the uniqueness of the country's history and culture.<sup>27</sup>

Actually, the Derg did consider overthrowing Haile Selassie's government some time in early July but rejected it because its members could not see eye-to-eye on the subject.<sup>28</sup> However, this did not stand in the way of its actions, which it started taking at the same time as it was expressing its allegiance to the crown and to Endalkachew's cabinet.<sup>29/30</sup> On June 28, the Derg had placed the mass media under its control. In July and August, it used radio, television, newspapers, letters to government departments, the backing of the army and the police, and the guidance of 'Ethiopia First' to exercise increasing significant executive and legislative functions to the detriment of the powers of the cabinet, the King and Parliament - a move which has aptly been described as the 'Creeping Coup'.

The Derg did not abandon the primary purpose for which it was established (the arrest of the officials of the ancien régime who were still at large). In a series of publications in the main newspaper of the government (Addis Zemen), it issued long lists of names of these officials and called upon them to give themselves up or to face confiscation of their assets. In July and August, it was reported that about one hundred of such officials had been detained. Most of them gave themselves up voluntarily; but those who did not were arrested by force and also had their assets confiscated, through Derg letters to such agencies as the banks, the municipality and the Ministry of Land Reform<sup>31</sup>.

At the same time as it was placing the officials under arrest, the Derg set about undermining Endalkachew's cabinet and gradually reducing it to a status of subservience. On June 29, some Derg representatives went to the cabinet and proposed the establishment of a joint committee between the Derg and the cabinet, ostensibly to study '...the situation in the country...'<sup>32</sup>. Within about a week of this, no less than ten meetings of the joint committee, made up of four cabinet ministers and some Derg representatives were held mainly to try and thrash out the relations between the two bodies<sup>33</sup>.

One of the early questions raised by the cabinet was whether it was appropriate for it to deal with a body, whose legal status was undefined, to say the least. This prompted the Derg to send a delegation on July 3 to the King to ask his permission, among other things, to work closely with the cabinet in the interest of the country's security, unity, development and the improvement of the army and the police. The King, who had the power to take any measures<sup>34</sup> he deemed to be in the interest of the country,<sup>35</sup> granted the request.

With the legal hurdle out of the way, the Derg representatives explained to the joint committee that the aims of the Derg were "Ethiopia First", the arrest of corrupt officials and the removal of obstacles<sup>36</sup> from both within and outside the cabinet which might stand in the way of its smooth operations. On their part, the cabinet representatives explained that the cabinet had adopted its programme of action on April 9, 1974, but was unable to "solve" the problems of the country because of the demonstrations, the absence of security, and because responsibility was entrusted to the cabinet while power was vested elsewhere. The problems of the country were indicated to be the drought, the decline of the tourist trade, lack of confidence by foreign investors in the country and decline of agricultural output due to aggravating relations between the tenants and landlords.

The most important and protracted issue discussed in the joint committee proved to be the question of who should tackle these problems next. The cabinet representative suggested that another cabinet - Derg joint committee should be established combining both responsibility and power and that the Derg, or some of its members, be despatched to the provinces to create branch offices which would come under the committee. After consultations with the Derg, its representatives rejected the cabinet's proposals and, instead, told the cabinet to continue working under the constitution and to tackle the problems itself. They said that the Derg preferred to continue working outside the cabinet. The cabinet could do nothing beyond expressing doubt on the wisdom of the Derg's response.<sup>37</sup>

Clearly, this was a show-down between the two contending parties (the Derg and the Cabinet). As already noted, however, the Derg had the armed forces, the police and the mass media behind it. Further, it had, by now, the blessing of the King and had, as a result, acquired some semblance of legality. Under the circumstances, the Derg was in a position to assert its will against the helpless cabinet<sup>38</sup> whose members were, by now, probably divided between those who were willing to work under the Derg and those who were not. The Derg acted to isolate those members who were not amenable to its whims; On July 16, it arrested Lt. General Abiye Abebe (Minister of Defence)<sup>39</sup> and on July 22 it replaced Lij Endalkachew Mekonnen by Lij Michael Imru as Prime Minister<sup>40</sup>. In addition to his other responsibilities, Lt. General Aman Andom was appointed Minister of Defence in a subsequent Cabinet reshuffle<sup>41</sup>. The Derg's control of the cabinet was now complete.

The next to fall prey to the Derg's designs was the King, who by then was helpless and isolated, most of his close protégés having been arrested, and the rest having betrayed him. As of July 17, the tone of the mass media turned harsher than before. Almost every other day, it

started issuing lengthy and populist articles vilifying Haile Selassie's government as having been highly corrupt and exploitative<sup>42</sup>. By the second half of August it appears that the Derg felt the King had been sufficiently discredited in the eyes of the public for it to start dissolving the institutions around the Crown (with the help of which the monarch had exercised his prerogative powers) as well as confiscating the enterprises in which the King and the other members of the Royal Family had a vested interest. Hence, on August 15, it was reported that the Minister of Pen (the King's Secretariat) had been brought under the Derg until such time as it was transferred to the cabinet<sup>43</sup>. Two days later, it was announced that the crown council, the special brigade and the Chilot (a court of final instance, presided over by the King) had all been dissolved<sup>44</sup>. Also, the Lion Bus Company (August 28)<sup>45</sup>, the St. George Brewery and the Haile Selassie Prize Trust (September 6)<sup>46</sup>, were brought under the administration of the Ministry of Finance because, it was explained, most of their assets and shares belonged to the King and the other members of the Royal Family<sup>47</sup>.

Thus, in July and August, 1974, the Derg incarcerated the bulk of the top officials of the ancien régime, reduced the cabinet to a status of subservience and isolated the King from the exercise of power without any opposition from the public. If there was any feedback it was from the militant left which condemned the measures as being haphazard and off the socialist path and demanded for more and more radical actions to be taken by the Derg, or preferably, by a "People's Government" to be made up of the representatives of the social groups, including the army, which had been active in the popular uprising<sup>48</sup>. Under these circumstances, Derg radicals were able to rally support within the Derg for carrying out a coup d'état<sup>49</sup>.

As noted earlier, the questions of overthrowing Haile Selassie's government and the nature of the

government that should replace it were considered by the Derg, in early July, but postponed until such time as a compromise on the issues raised could be reached. Again, the same questions came to the forefront in early September and were debated between the sixth and the tenth of that month<sup>50</sup>. Apparently, seven alternative proposals were discussed in those meetings: to maintain the Crown and remove the obstacles from within and outside the cabinet, to maintain the Crown and replace the cabinet with a new one, to maintain the Crown and establish a civilian - military joint cabinet, to replace the Crown with a provisional military head of state and improve the cabinet, to replace the Crown and the cabinet with a military government, or to replace the Crown and the cabinet with a people's government<sup>51</sup>. The final verdict was not proclaimed until September 12, 1974, which has since been annually celebrated as Revolution Day.

Since, in the summer of 1974, the Derg was already in a position to declare curfews, effect arrests, confiscate assets and appoint ministers including the premier, it can arguably be maintained that it had become the government as of June 28, 1974, when it was established. However, the formalization of that fact did not take place until September 12, 1974, when it issued proclamations 1 and 2 which suspended the existing constitution, deposed King Haile Selassie I, and dissolved the parliament. The proclamations replaced these institutions with the Derg which was declared to have assumed "...full governmental powers..." until such time as a people's assembly was established<sup>52</sup>.

In part, the assumption of "...full governmental powers..." meant that the Derg appointed itself as a collective head of state<sup>53</sup>. The Derg was to express this status through its chairman who was authorised to grant audience to foreign guests and ambassadors and to execute international agreements on behalf of, and in accordance with the decisions of the Derg<sup>54</sup>. Also, it was envisaged

that the functions of the head of state would be transferred to the Crown Prince, Merid Azmach Asfaw-Wosen, who was to be crowned as a constitutional monarch upon his return to the country<sup>55</sup> from Switzerland where he was staying for medical treatment<sup>56</sup>.

More important was the fact that the Derg was entrusted with sweeping law-making powers. Thus, it was authorised to enact "all types of laws"<sup>57</sup>, declare war and take all necessary measures to safeguard the integrity and defence of the country<sup>58</sup>, and determine which treaties and international agreements would be subject to ratification before becoming binding on the state, and ratify the same<sup>59</sup>. An example of the Derg's law-making power noted earlier is the issuance by it of proclamations which, under the suspended constitution could only have been promulgated by parliament and the King.

Even if articulated less clearly than its law-making power, the executive powers of the Derg were no less extensive than the former. Obviously, such authorisations of the Derg as the power to take any action necessary to safeguard the defence and integrity of the state<sup>60</sup>, had implications for both legislative and executive powers. More specific was the mandate of the Derg not only to make laws, but also to provide for their implementation<sup>61</sup>. If these provisions sound vague or very narrow in their scope, the Derg's broad mandate, to assume "full governmental powers"<sup>62</sup> could always be invoked to justify the exercise of any executive powers.

### **(C) The Derg's Assertion of Power over the Vanguard of the Popular Uprising**

The Derg was "a provisional military government" and as such could leave little or no room for popular participation in the supreme decision-making processes. Ostensibly, the only concession it made towards public participation in supreme governmental affairs was the establishment by it of a Provisional National Advisory

Commission to advise it on how a non-provisional government should be established and, more specifically, to draft a new constitution for the country<sup>63</sup>. The membership of the commission was limited to a maximum of sixty being made up of two representatives from two Co-operatives, three from The Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions, six from three Teachers' Associations, four from the Christian and Muslim communities, two from the business community, fourteen from the provinces and twenty-one from government agencies<sup>64</sup>. The Commission would have given the civilian population a say in the future of the country, but its importance was watered down by the fact that it was reduced to the status of an advisory body whose recommendations could be vetoed by the Derg at will<sup>65</sup>.

Further, quite unlike the early part of 1974, the public was now denied the right to manifest its demands through strikes and demonstrations. Immediately after its establishment, the Derg condemned all forms of strikes and demonstrations as being contrary to its aim of change without bloodshed and as being inimical to the economy of the country, and threatened to take stern measures against those who participated in them<sup>66</sup>. Also, the law which announced the Derg's formal seizure of power on September 12, 1974, prohibited engaging in any strikes, holding unauthorised demonstrations and assemblies and contravening the Derg's principle of "Ethiopia First"<sup>67</sup>. People who went against these provisions were to be tried before a military court without any right of appeal<sup>68</sup>.

The fact that the Derg was a military government which excluded civilian participation in the supreme decision-making processes of the government and the fact that it had restrictive policies concerning democratic rights brought it into conflict with what may be called the vanguards of the popular uprising of early 1974. As noted earlier, the then uprising was kept aflame by the formally elected leaders of the corporate groups like the

CELU, the Teachers' Association, and the Student Unions. Also active behind the scenes were the co-ordinating committees that mushroomed at the time among the civil servants, military units and the police all of which, by law, had been prevented from creating association of any sort. These committees co-ordinated strikes, demonstrations and the issuance of petitions to the government and anti-government leaflets to be distributed to the public. Further, in some provincial capitals there emerged, at the time of the popular uprising, what looked like spontaneous popular governments made up of teachers, students, workers and delegates to municipal councils which attempted to run the local administration, albeit temporarily<sup>69</sup>.

Some of these groups continued to be politically active even after the Derg's emergence and seizure of power in June and September 1974. One major exception to this were the civil servants, who stopped having strikes and demonstrations as of early June, 1974, thus lending their name to the rhetoric of the Derg, which continued to issue in the official newspaper (Addis Zemen) long lists of Government Agencies which were supposed to have written messages supporting the establishment of the Derg and its policies<sup>70</sup>.

Other sections of the population were however, restive. On October 26, 1974, for instance, the unemployed of Addis Ababa met in front of CELU's head office to demand employment from the Government. They were dispersed by the police with gunfire which resulted in two deaths and one wounded<sup>71</sup>. Also, the agricultural tenants who, as far as the evidence goes did not take part in the early 1974 uprising, were, around the time of the deposition of the King, beginning to refuse to pay rent and also to assert a claim to the land they worked, partly because they misunderstood a statement of the Derg that no additional rent was to be charged, to mean that tenancy was abolished<sup>72</sup> and partly because some civilian activists were encouraging them to believe the government

had introduced land reform. This took place in several awrajas (sub-provinces) of Hararghe Arsi, and Sidamo provinces where the assertive tenants were harassed and subdued by the military units within the areas concerned<sup>73</sup>. Obviously the uprising of the unemployed and the tenants had very little to do with opposing the establishment of a military government or its policies.

More to the point was the opposition of CELU. In its annual congress of September 15-17, 1974, it passed a resolution demanding the dismantling of the Derg and the establishment in its place of a provisional people's government and the reinstatement of fundamental civil rights which had been suspended by the Derg<sup>74</sup>. The Derg ordered CELU to withdraw its resolution, and, when that was not forthcoming, it moved to arrest its president, vice-president and secretary<sup>75</sup>. CELU reacted by calling for a general strike of its members to take effect as of September 25, but it failed to materialise because of the Derg's stern warning and threats against so doing and because of the intervention of the unit co-ordinating<sup>76</sup> at the factory level<sup>77</sup>.

Another of the vanguards of the early 1974 popular uprising which put up resistance to Derg rule was the student movement. On September 17 and 18, 1974, students of the Arat Kilo and Sidist Kilo colleges of the Addis Ababa University held meetings in which they adopted the resolution of CELU, demanded the replacement of the Derg by a "peoples government" and rejected the Derg's decision to send them on a campaign in order to educate the people about basic health care and developmental problems and afterwards, went on a demonstration in support of their claims<sup>78</sup>. On October 11, students of Addis Ababa and of the Alemaya Agricultural College (Hararghe Province) also went on a demonstration demanding the reinstatement of democratic rights prior to the implementation of the campaign programme. The Derg's security forces dispersed these demonstrations with gunfire and arrests<sup>79</sup>.

Much more pressing was the resistance to Derg rule by the various military units, including the Engineers Unit, the Army Aviation, the Medical Corps, the Military Band, the Veterans of the Congo Campaign, the Borena-Negele Fourth Brigade, the Seventeenth Battalion, the Air Force, the First Division (Body guard)<sup>80</sup>, the Third Division and the Second Division<sup>81</sup>. In other words certain of the units in all of the five military divisions, particularly those located in the capital, were part of the resistance.

The most ardent military opposition to the Derg's seizure of power seems to have come from the Engineers, the Army Aviation and the Bodyguard, all of which were located in Addis Ababa. In early August, 1974, it was reported that a rift was emerging between the Derg and the Army Aviation because the latter had demanded the reinstatement of democratic rights (including freedom of speech, writing, demonstration, assembly and organising political groups), the distribution of land to the "tiller", the launching of a planned economy and the establishment of a democratic people's government<sup>82</sup>. Within weeks of the Derg's formal seizure of power on September 12, the opposition to Derg rule had spread to the other military units in and around Addis Ababa, leading to the arrest of many officers and other ranks, including Colonel Yegezu of the Army Aviation, Major Teferra Tekle-Ab of the Engineers Unit, a Tekeste of the Air Force and Major Damtew Teferra of the Military Police<sup>83</sup>. The final show-down came on October 7, 1974, when the Derg, with the help of the more amenable military units, especially from the Third Division, crushed the resistance of the Engineers with force after having killed five, wounding an unknown number and imprisoning some three hundred of their members. At the same time, it surrounded the Army Aviation and managed to subdue them without much resistance. The First Division (the Bodyguard) saved itself from the wrath of the Derg by handing over the activists among its ranks, including

Captain Demise Taferra, chairman of the Bodyguards' Co-ordinating Committee<sup>84</sup>. On November 21, 1974, "Democracia" reported that the Third Division had imprisoned its commander and recalled its representatives to the Derg, including Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, and that the Unit Committees of the Second Division were claiming equal status with the Derg because their members were also elected by the Army units that they represented<sup>85</sup>.

The most important opposition, especially in the long run, came from two budding underground political organizations, established several years before 1974 among veterans of the student movement abroad. The first of these was what is usually referred to as the Democracia group and what emerged as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the second was what is usually referred to as the Voice of the Masses Group and what emerged in April 1976, as the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM). The leadership of EPRP returned to Ethiopia in July, 1974, and launched its weekly paper (Democracia) in the same month. Though the leadership of AESM did not return to Ethiopia until the beginning of 1975, it appears it had enough followers in the country to launch its weekly paper (Voice of the Masses) in August, 1974<sup>86</sup>. From then on, the EPRP and AESM were beginning to see themselves as championing the cause of the vanguards of the early 1974 popular uprising; however, being anti-Derg themselves, they may have overstated the case of the opposition. The circumstances of the time dictate the conclusion, nonetheless, that the bulk of the groups claimed by the two organs to have been actively opposed to Derg rule were indeed engaged in anti-Derg demonstrations and boycotts of classes.

On their part, "Democracia" and "Voice of the Masses" advocated and influenced Derg's imprisonment of members of the aristocracy, nationalisation of their assets, suspension of the existing constitution and the

deposition of the King while at the same time condemning the same actions as superficial. They argued again and again that what was required to effect a fundamental change was the dismantling of the censorship machinery and the spying network of the ancien régime, the nationalization of industrial and financial institutions and the granting of land to the "tiller", thereby abolishing capitalist and imperialist exploitation in one fell swoop<sup>87</sup>. The two most important demands of "Democracia" and "Voice of the Masses" which they were to advocate for a long time to come, were: the reinstatement of democratic rights<sup>88</sup> to the broad masses, especially the right to form associations and the immediate handing over of power by the Derg to "a provisional People's Government"<sup>89</sup> made up of the representative of the workers, farmers, students, teachers, small business men, low-ranking civil servants, artisans and handi-crafts men, progressive intellectuals, the unemployed and the army<sup>90</sup>. Essentially, the Derg was being criticised for lack of class consciousness, for not vigorously pursuing a Marxist-Leninist line and for manifesting "Fascist"<sup>91</sup> tendencies in its handling of the opposition.

The Derg's response to the challenges of the civilian and military activists was not limited to the use of fire arms and tear gas against and the imprisonment of those who went on strikes and demonstrations, but also extended to resorting to counter-propaganda, summary executions of those already in prison and the disbanding of rebellious military units. On the propaganda level, the Derg re-iterated, time and again, that it was itself a provisional military government which intended to act as a vehicle for the transfer of power from the ancien régime to a people's government<sup>92</sup> after a new constitution had been adopted<sup>93</sup>. At the time, the general public may have believed this; the political activists among them, on the other hand, refused to take the Derg's commitment at face

value. This was so, partly because of the Derg's reluctance to commit itself to any timetable in which it would transfer power to the people and partly because some of its programmes had a long-term perspective. On September 2 and 26, the Derg's Chairman Lt. General Aman Andom explained that a civilian government would be established after the people had been made, through education, conscious enough to administer themselves<sup>94</sup>. Also, like some sections of "Ethiopia First" which have been noted earlier, a section of the thirteen-point programme issued by the Derg on September 13, 1974, could only be accomplished over a long period of time. These included the commitment of the Derg to ensure the rights, equality and development of the people; to abolish discrimination on the basis of nationality, religion and income; to remove superstitions inimical to the modernisation of the country; to provide free education to all Ethiopians; and, to expand industrial production<sup>95</sup>.

Moreover, the Derg had the official daily newspaper (Addis Zemen) publish frequent messages of support from a wide spectrum of the population by way of showing the existence of popular support for the military government and its policies. Further, it condemned all those that opposed it as puppets or remnants of the ancien régime and asked members of the public to hand over those who were misleading the people about the Derg's true intentions<sup>96</sup>.

As of the middle of November, the Derg started taking more and more desperate actions on account of the problems with the opposition which were beginning to reverberate within the Derg. On November 16, therefore, it issued no less than four draconian legislations; the first establishing a military court with a mandate to try any offences; the second describing new offences in addition to those provided for in the existing Penal Code of Ethiopia; the third providing for special procedures for the military court; and the fourth declaring an

emergency law authorising the Minister of Interior to conduct search and seizure without warrant<sup>97</sup>. One could have presumed that these laws were targeted towards the officials of the ancien régime who were under arrest and who were being screened by the investigation commission established for the purpose about eight months earlier. It is justifiable to presume this because the Derg was reiterating the same at the time. However, the contents of those legislations reflect that they were actually directed towards arresting the hostile activities of those opposed to Derg rule.

On November 23, the Derg showed how bloody it could be by a summary execution of well over sixty detainees, not because they had been tried by any court of law, but because the Derg, according to itself, had made "a political decision"<sup>98</sup>. Included among those executed were two Derg members, five non-Derg member junior officers and other ranking members of the armed forces and others whose number and identity it was promised would be revealed later. According to the Derg, these had attempted to overthrow the government by instigating feud and bloodshed among the various units of the armed forces<sup>99</sup> and, according to "Democracia", they were the activists within the First Division, the Engineers Unit, the Army Aviation and the Air Force who had been placed under arrest in the preceding months of September and October for their role in opposing the military government<sup>100</sup>.

Lt. General Aman Andom, Chairman of the Derg, was one of the sixty killed on the same day. The why's and wherefore's of his killing have been a matter of much verbal and written conjecture and there is, perhaps, no need to add to it here. One thing is clear; for some time before November 23, he could not see eye to eye with most Derg members on a number of issues including most probably, the handling of the Eritrean question and the unruly proceedings of Derg meetings. As a result, he had resigned his post of chairmanship around November 15<sup>101</sup>,

which could only have thrown the Derg into confusion and more desperation. It appears that some Derg members who sought to victimize him, then started accusing him of dictatorial tendencies, of having had dealings with foreigners and the army behind the back of the Derg, and of reluctance to delegate some of his powers to others as the Derg had wished<sup>102</sup>. The fundamental point of friction seems to have been that in appointing the General as its chairman, some of the Derg members had intended to make of him a figure-head whose reputation it could use to advantage. However, the General was the wrong choice for this purpose; he was a strong character, well able to stand-up to the King, let alone the Derg, which was composed of members of the armed forces and the police very much his junior<sup>103</sup>. Be that as it may, on November 23, General Aman Andom died in an exchange of fire with agents of the Dergs' security men who had come to his residence to arrest him according to some, on orders of the Derg, and, according to others, on orders of the Dergs' First Vice Chairman (Mengistu Haile-Mariam)<sup>104</sup>.

The remaining fifty-two victims of the Derg's political decision were twenty-nine of some of the highest civilian dignitaries and twenty-three senior military and police officers of the ancien régime whom the co-ordination committee of the Armed Forces and the Police and later the Derg had been incarcerating, starting from early 1974. Included in this group were the two previous Prime Ministers (TSEHAFI TIZZY AKLILOU HAFTE-WALD and LiJ Endalkachew Mekonnen). Again, the reasons for the summary execution of all these officials is mysterious, especially in view of the fact that an investigation Commission had been established to investigate their cases and in view of the fact that the Derg had time and again bound itself to commit them to trial<sup>105</sup>. One explanation appears to be that the officials were sacrificed on the altar of the Derg's desire to win to its side the civilian left, which was

the only vocal group in the country. In the proceeding months, there were underground leaflets which urged 'political actions' against the officials of the ancien régime without actually explaining what they meant by the term. Also, Democracia and Voice of the Masses had, since almost their inception, been asserting again and again that the Derg was reactionary because it was taking measures against the 'progressives' (the civilian and military activists who were opposed to Derg rule) while it was pampering the officials of the ancien régime in prison<sup>106</sup>. That the Derg wanted to identify itself with the militant left is obvious from its statements about it<sup>107</sup>. Yet another explanation has been that the First Voice Chairman moved the Derg to take the action in order to submerge Aman's death into the obscurity of the elimination of the "corrupt" officials<sup>108</sup>.

It is one of the ironies of the time - or the double faced disposition of the Derg - that a week before the executions the first vice - chairman of the Derg, Major Mengistu Haile Marimba, had expounded that during the Glorious Revolution in England, hundreds and thousands of people had been killed and many houses had been burnt to the ground; that during the French revolution, many aristocrats had been decapitated; and that during the Russian revolution, members of the opposition had been wiped out like locusts. He contrasted these with the then on-going revolution of Ethiopia which, he said, ousted the three thousand year-old aristocracy without a drop of blood, disproving the theory of the world intellectuals that a revolution is not possible without blood-shed<sup>109</sup>. In spite of this and in spite of the Derg's earlier commitments to bring about the change without blood-shed as in "Ethiopia First", various proclamations and releases to the press, the "revolution" was officially stained with blood as of at least November 23, 1974, and rule of law had given way to expediency.

By and large, the Derg was tolerant of the civilian militants but not of the military activist. In order to

quell military resistance to its rule it disbanded the rebellious units either by imprisoning their members, as in the case of the Engineers unit, or by assigning them to remote parts of the country, as in the case of the First Division. Similarly, towards the end of November, the Derg called to Addis Ababa some two hundred and seventy-six members of the armed forces and the police, gave them a short seminar on its policies and, starting from December 4, assigned them to various government departments to act as its watch-dogs. These the Derg called 'apostles of change',<sup>110</sup>. The bulk of the 276 seminar participants were drawn from among the unit co-ordination committees which had later been recognised and maintained by the Derg to act as bridges between it and the various military units and the police. However, since a lot of them seem to have been active in the anti-Derg opposition and since, in some cases, the unit co-ordination committees refused to be elected by military units and the police,<sup>111</sup> the Derg removed them from the midst of the army and the police, under the guise of assigning their members to relatively high government positions.

The elected representatives of the armed forces and the police came together and formed the Derg on June 28, 1974. The emergence of the Derg marked the beginning of the end of the ancien régime as the Derg started whittling down its powers. Also, the emergence of the Derg marks the beginning of the end of the people's exercise of democratic rights since it prohibited strikes, demonstrations and boycott of classes within a week of its establishment.

The armed forces and the police created the Derg mainly for the purpose of bringing to justice the officials of the ancien régime who were supposed to be responsible for the backwardness of the country on account of being corrupt and inept and also answerable for the deaths of about one hundred thousand people because of the 1973-4 drought, the realities of which

they were supposed to have covered up. In spite of this mandate, the Derg concentrated on the question of power. It considered alternative forms of governments to the ancien régime and, on September 12, 1974, converted itself into a provisional military government. On that day, not only did it formalise its powers but also institutionalised the abolition of democratic rights in proclamations 1 and 2, 1974. The fact that it was a military government and the fact that it had strict policies on democratic rights brought it into conflict with the civilian and military activists who were opposed to the establishment of a military government. These groups felt that those who had been active in the early 1974 uprising should have been included in the government and should be able to enjoy the democratic rights that they had gained under the previous régime and particularly in the course of the uprising. By December, 1974 the Derg was able to assert its will against anyone who cared to oppose it including its own members who sought to be independent minded, other members of the security forces and the civilian population.

However the manner in which it managed to assert its will led the Derg to become dictatorial. The establishment of a military government itself and the subsequent abolition of democratic rights effectively excluded the civilian population from participating in government affairs and from the right to express its wishes. Further, the summary execution of Derg members who did not toe the line meant that all other members were accountable to the Derg and not to the units which had elected them; and the disbanding of the rebellious military units and the Unit Co-ordination Committees, meant that the Derg's accountability to the armed forces and the police, which had created it in the first place, was put to an end. Finally the arbitrariness with which it disposed of the then helpless officials of the ancien régime and the military activists that it had already placed under arrest showed that the Derg was not under

the law even when that law was made by itself. Hence by the end of 1974, the Derg had become a law unto itself; a dictatorship that was to rule Ethiopia for years to come by decree, or, rather by considerations of expediency.

### FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Lefort, R. Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution, Zed Press, London 1983, p. 52.
2. Erlich, H. "The Establishment of the Derg: The turning of a protest movement into a revolution", Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies, Chicago, session B. ed. Robert L. Hess, April 13-16, 1978, p. 787.
3. In the initial stages of the uprising the officers were pressurized by the government to quell the soldiers movement. Then they used to meet in the military club and exchange ideas; later, however, the radicals amongst them joined the meetings of the soldiers and civilians in the woods, churchyards, etc.
4. The History Committee, The Emergence and Development of the Ethiopian Revolution, Oct. 1983, unpublished, ch. 3, p.7.
5. See note 2 above p. 792.
6. Pliny the Middle Aged, "The PMAC: Origins and structures, Part I, " Africanist notes, Vol. 1, 1978, pp. 6-7.
7. See note 2 and 6 above.
8. See note 2 above p. 792 and note 4 above ch. 3, p. 8.
9. "The seven M.P.'s who interceded for the release of the previous officials are barred from the assembly", Addis Zemen, No. 437, June 20, 1974.
10. See note 6 above p. 8.
11. See note 4 above, ch. 3, p. 8.
12. See note 6 above pp. 7-8.
13. See note 6 above pp. 7-8.
14. See note 2 above p. 792.
15. "It is all the people of Ethiopia through their votes that determines the future of the government administration", Addis Zemen, No. 512, October 1, 1974.

16. The Territorial Army is a reserve force with only a corps of about 10,000 standing officers and soldiers..
17. See note 4 above, p.8.
18. Interview with Mr. X.
19. "The military administrative committee makes appointments." Addis Zemen No. 505, September 13, 1974.
20. While the elections of Mengistu and Atnafu on that day is common knowledge that of Gebriges Wolde Hana a Secretary General and the circumstances of his removal from that position have remained obscure.
21. See note 2 above p. 788.
22. See for example, "General Aman Andom and the American Brigadier exchange opinions", Addis Zemen, no. 453 July 11, 1974, and "Lt. Gen. Aman exchanges opinions with an ambassador", Addis Zemen, No. 455, July 13, 1974.
23. In 1987, Comrade Mengistu Haile-Mariam was General Secretary of the workers' party of Ethiopia and on the verge of becoming president of the democratic republic of Ethiopia.
24. "The entire speech of Comrade Chairman", The Worker, Vol. 8, No. 388, September 4, 1987, pp. 8-9 The Worker, is an organ of the central committee of the worker's party of Ethiopia.
25. "A chapter in the struggle", A provisional military administrative council special issue on the first anniversary of the People's Revolution Day, p. 24.
26. "His majesty orders in favour of the ideas presented by the armed forces committee", Addis Zemen, No. 447, July 4, 1974.
27. "The armed forces committee expresses its allegiance to his majesty, it gives an explanation about its aims", Addis Zemen, No. 452, July 10, 1974.
28. For the full text of "Ethiopia First" see appendix 2.
29. See note 25 above and "Comrade Chairman's report to the first session of the National Shengo", Meskerem, Volume 8 No. 390, September. 10, 1987, p. 8.

30. "The armed forces committee takes useful decisions expresses its allegiance to his majesty and the new cabinet", Addis Zemen, No. 445, July 2, 1974.
31. See for example: "Confiscation decision taken against two officials who did not give themselves up", Addis Zemen, No. 456, July 14, 1974.
32. "After an emergency meeting, a high committee is established to consider the country's situation", Addis Zemen, No. 446, June 30, 1974.
33. See note 4 above p. 12.
34. See the Ethiopian revised Constitution of 1955, particularly article 26-36.
35. See note 26 above.
36. It appears from the circumstances that by "obstacles" the Derg means individuals who did not co-operate with it.
37. See note 4 above pp.12-16.
38. See note 29 above.
39. Addis Zemen, No. 458, July 17, 1974 Lt. Gen Abiy Abebe gives himself up: The sixty-one detained previous officials transferred to the fourth division.
40. "An important appointment", Addis Zemen, No. 463, July 23, 1974.
41. Addis Zemen, No. 472, Aug. 3, 1974, Appointment of second Prime Minister and member of the cabinet.
42. See, for example, "The Armed Forces Co-ordinating Committee issues on elaboration", Addis Zemen, No. 458, July 17, 1974.
43. "It is decided that the ministry of Pen should be brought under the control of the armed forces co-ordinating committee", Addis Zemen, No. 482, August 15, 1974.
44. "The first measures of the armed forces committee; the dissolution of the crown council and the Chilot", Addis Zemen, No. 484, August 17, 1974.

45. "It is decided that the Lion Bus Company should be under the ministry of finance", Addis Zemen, No. 492, August 28, 1974.
46. "The armed forces co-ordinating committee gives an explanation and decision concerning the St. George Brewery and the Price Trust", Addis Zemen, No. 501, September, 7 1974.
47. See note 46 above.
48. See section C below.
49. See note 29 above.
50. See note 29 above, p. 9.
51. See note 24 above at p. 25.
52. Article 6 Proclamation 1, 1974, and Article 3, Proclamation 2 1974.
53. See particularly the Amharic version of the preamble of Proclamation 2, 1974.
54. Article 8, Proclamation 2, 1974.
55. Article 3, Proclamation 1, 1974.
56. Quite contrary to its earlier decision to retain the Crown under Article 2 of Proclamation 1, 1974, the Derg, on March 17, 1975, abolished the Crown altogether thus opening the way for the continued exercise, by the Derg and its chairman, of the functions of a head of state. (see Article 2 of Proclamation 27, 1975.)
57. Article 6, Proclamation 2, 1974.
58. Article 5, Proclamation 2, 1974.
59. Article 4, Proclamation 2, 1974.
60. Article 5 Proclamation 2, 1974.
62. Article 6 Proclamation 1, 1974, and Article 3, Proclamation 2 1974.
63. According to Article 5(b) of Proclamation 1, 1974, the mandate of the Commission was to improve on Endalkachew's draft constitution and, according to Article 7 (1) of Proclamation 2, 1974, its mandate was to draft a new constitution altogether.
64. Article 3 (1) and (3) of Proclamation 12, 1974.

65. Article 9 of Proclamation 12, 1974.
66. "The Armed Forces Committee gives a Warning Concerning Offices which intend to go on strike", Addis Zemen, No. 451, July 9, 1974.
67. Article 8 of Proclamation 1, 1974.
68. Article 9 of Proclamation 1, 1974.
69. "People's Government and the Students' Movement", Democracia, No. 8, September 5, 1974, p. 3, "Some Real Events Indicate that the Government of the Select Officers is Fascistic", Voice of the Masses, No. 7, October 15, 1974, p.6, Democracia, and Voice of the Masses, were two underground organizations which later emerged as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party and the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement.
70. (Find Addis Zemen article indicating support for the Derg by government agencies), See, for example, "The messages of congratulations and support to the provisional military administrative council continue", Addis Zemen, No. 509, September 18, 1974.
71. "Those who begged for bread suffocated with tear-gas", Democracia, No. 14, November 3, 1974, p. 1 ff; "A fascistic event that cannot be forgotten", Voice of the Masses, No. 11, October 29, 1974.
72. "An explanation is given about rent of agricultural and house tenants", Addis Zemen, No. 515, September, 25, 1974.
73. "Some real events indicate that the government of the select officers is fascistic", Voice of the Masses, No. 7, October 1, 1974, p.6.
74. "Why did the general strike of workers not succeed", Voice of the Masses, No. 7, October 1, 1974, pp. 1-2.
75. "Not possible to mock the joint struggle of the entire people", Addis Zemen, No. 515, September 25, 1974.
76. The so-called unit committees were probably a continuation of what I have called "the unit co-ordinating committees as recognised by the Derg after its establishment".
77. "The Workers of the Cotton Company Refuse to Accept the Decision of CELU", Addis Zemen, No. 516, September 26, 1974.

78. "News of Struggle", Democracia, No. 10, September 18, 1974 pp. 4-5.
79. "The Hunting of Progressives", Democracia, No. 12 February 5, 1967 (Ethiopian Calender), p.6.
80. "Voice of Blood", Voice of the Masses, No. 9, October 15, 1974 p.6.
81. "The struggle will not miss its mark", Democracia, No. 16, November 21, 1974, p.4.
82. Addressed To, No. 07/06 (a clandestine leaflet of the Army Aviation) cited in "The Correct Path", Democracia, No. 4 August 8, 1974, p.4.
83. "News of Struggle", Voice of the masses, No. 8, October 8, 1974, p.9.
84. "Voice of Blood", Voice of masses, No. 9, October 15, 1974, p.6 and "News of Struggle", Voice of the Masses, No. 8 October 8, 1974, p.9.
85. See note 79.
86. At about the same time there were other political organizations like Abiyilt (revolution) but they were more obscure than EPRP and AESM for more detail on this, see Chapter 5 below.
87. See, for example, "On the morrow of the celebration", Democracia, No. 11, October 4, 1974, p.1, and "The Struggle of the Broad Ethiopian people will continue", The Voice of the Masses, special issue, no number, September 13, 1974, pp.1 ff.
88. Democratic rights were indeed provided for in the legislations of the ancien régime but their proper implementation was questionable.
89. "A Provisional People's Government be Established; Down with Military Dictatorship", Democracia, No. 13, October 26, 1974, pp. 1 ff; "An Erroneous Choice Leads in a Dangerous Direction", Voice of the Masses, No. 10, October 22, 1974, p.1 ff.
90. "It is Necessary to Distinguish Between Friends and Enemies", Voice of the Masses, No. 3 September, 1974, p. 3; and "To Farm Haphazardly is to Breed Weeds", Democracia, No. 1 no date, p.4.
91. The word "fascist" was used by both groups and more emphatically by the Democracia group, to

refer to the Derg's violent reactions to the opposition. Whether it was used in the technical sense, and whether it was an appropriate term, became a matter of debate later on.

92. See, for example, Article 6, Proclamation 1, 1974.
93. Article 5 (b), Proclamation 1, 1974 and Article 7 (2), Proclamation 2, 1974.
94. "The Entire People of Ethiopia will Determine Through Election the Future of Government Administration", Addis Zemen, No. 512, September 21, 1974, and " the Aim of Our Movement is to make the Ethiopia - People Self Governing and Self-Administering", Addis Zemen, No. 516 September 26, 1974.
95. "The Derg's Aims", Addis Zemen, No. 505, September 13, 1974.
96. "The Ethiopian Provisional Military Administrative Council Issues a Special Communique", Addis Zemen, No. 520, October 3, 1974.
97. Respectively, the legislations are proclamations, No. 7; 1974, No. 8, 1974 No. 9, 1974 and No. 10, 1974.
98. "The Derg makes an important political decision", Addis Zemen, No. 564, November 26, 1974.
99. See note 98 above.
100. "Unmitigated Fascism is Crowned in Ethiopia", Democracia, No. 17, November 24, 1974, p.2.
101. "Additional Explanation Concerning the Important Political Decision", Addis Zemen, No. 565, November 27, 1974.
102. "None Can Make us Betray our Commitment to the Ethiopian People by Any Means", Addis Zemen, No. 563, November 24, 1974.
103. The scorn with which Derg members were regarded not only by Gen. Aman Andom, but also by experienced technocrats and intellectuals, for being ill-educated, low-ranking members of the armed forces and the police, has always created a crisis of confidence in them, resulting in distrust between them and these groups.

104. Wilde-Giorgis, D, Red Tears, Red Sea Press, New York.
105. The Derg had committed itself to have the officials tried by a Court of Law, not only in releases to newspapers but also in some of its basic documents like "Ethiopia First", article 9 of Proclamation 1, 1974, and to a lesser extent in Proclamation 7 to 10 1094.
106. See for example, "News of Struggle", Democracia, No. 12, October 15, 1974, p. 5; and "The Broad Masses will not lose their victory for ever", Voice of the Masses, No. 9 October 15, 1974, pp. 4 ff.
107. "The First Vice-Chairman makes speeches to Various Military Units", Addis Zemen, No. 559, November 19, 1974.
108. See note 104 above.
109. Ibid.
110. "Members of the Armed Forces Take Oath of Office", Addis Zemen, No. 571, December 4, 1974.
111. See note 81.

## PART TWO

### THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY ORDER (DECEMBER 1974 - FEBRUARY 1977)

#### CHAPTER FOUR

##### The Socio-Economic Reforms of 1975

The main preoccupations of this chapter are the socio-economic reforms adopted by the Derg in the course of 1975. According to most writers these reforms (nationalization of land and financial, industrial and commercial undertakings) transformed the military coup d'état, examined in the previous chapter, into a revolution. Whereas the reforms are considered in sections A to D, the first section is devoted to an examination of the organs of state directly involved in the drafting and adoption of these policies. An attempt is also made in the relevant sections to indicate which government departments were involved in the drafting of the measure of nationalization concerned although this has not always been easy due to lack of sources.

Haile Selassie's government had realized that the early 1974 popular uprising was not limited to corporatist demands like pay increases, dismissal of departmental officials and recognition of union rights but, more importantly, extended to reforming the government itself. It had, accordingly, established a constitution-drafting committee which completed its work in the summer of the same year by drawing up a liberal constitution. At the height of the uprising, Endalkachew's cabinet was, apparently, divided among those who sought to leave all questions of reform to the government which was to be constituted in accordance with the new constitution, and those who sought to start adopting reforms right away.<sup>1</sup> No doubt prevarications of

the cabinet along these lines undermined its credibility and contributed to its downfall.

By the summer of 1974, the popular uprising had died down, and, with it, the pressure it had brought to bear on the government. What survived the emergence and subsequent assertion of authority by the Derg was the pressure of the radical left to have the government adopt Marxist-Leninist programmes and to have Derg replace itself with a "Provisional People's Government". Unlike Endalkachew's cabinet, the Derg did not prevaricate on the question of reforms; in the course of 1975, it pursued a series on nationalization measures which, as will be argued later, were in line with those demanded by the radical left and were adopted in order to appease them. The most important demand of the left (the immediate establishment of a provisional people's government) was, however, postponed indefinitely, as were all other questions to do with the establishment of parties and a non-provisional government.

The nationalization measures to be taken needed to be based on some political and economic programme; "Ethiopia First", which was adopted by the Derg in July of the same year as its programme of action, did not have a policy on the national economy to speak of, and even less, on the more particular question of nationalization. At the time, in fact, the Derg went out of its way to reassure domestic and international businessmen that it did not have any intentions of nationalizing their assets.<sup>2</sup> Despite that, it found it appropriate to confiscate the assets of the royal family including those of the king and the aristocracy. However, these measures were taken, not as a result of any economic policies, but partly as a result of the Derg's decision to confiscate the assets of the ancien regime's officials who did not hand themselves over when asked to do so and partly as a result of the simplistic creed reiterated by the Derg that even if the masses of the people had for centuries fought against foreign invaders to keep Ethiopia

independent and, hence, entitled to an equal share of the wealth of the country, the aristocracy had become rich by usurping the share of the poor.<sup>3</sup>

The left charged that "Ethiopia First" contained no guiding principles and condemned it as an embodiment of ethical and propagandist pronouncements devoid of any class content.<sup>4</sup> The Derg responded by saying that the opposition consisted of the partisans of the student movement, and were therefore, in the minority when contrasted to the number of people who supported the government; and that the Derg's actions would continue to be based on Ethiopia's cultural values.<sup>5</sup> The official media, in fact, went as far as declaring that Marx, Engels and Lenin were not appropriate solutions to Ethiopia's problems.<sup>6</sup>

It was on December 20, 1974, that the Derg's first fundamental political and economic programme, "Ethiopian Socialism", was issued. The Derg's policy statement explained that it was derived from an interpretation of "Ethiopia First" and from Ethiopian culture and religions. It further explained that even though it was a twelve-page document, it was capable of being subsumed under five basic principles: sovereignty, the absoluteness of Ethiopia's unity, self-reliance, the dignity of labour and the precedence of the public good. Elaborating the policies of the programme in the economic sphere, it said that those assets which were beneficial to the public would be nationalized and those which, if left in private hands would not go contrary to "Ethiopia First", would be left in the private sector. It was also stated that land would be owned by the people and the cottage industries would be promoted.<sup>7</sup>

In an article called "Ethiopian Socialism or Scientific Socialism", Voice of the Masses criticized the programme for falling foul of the Marxist-Leninist approach to revolution. It denied the existence of more than one kind of socialism and asserted that references to "British socialism" or "national socialism", as in the

case of Hitler's Germany, were wrong because those were not cases of socialism at all. It expounded, further, that there could not be Ethiopian electricity, Somali Electricity, etc since the fundamental law of electricity everywhere was the same. By the same token, it argued, socialism could only be the same everywhere; if there were differences between nations, they could only be secondary.<sup>8</sup>

Democracia also devoted an article entitled "What Kind of Socialism?" to reviewing the programme. It declared that it was not impressed by the inclusion of the word "socialism" in the programme because it was a word used in different senses by many governments including Kenya's, Tunisia's and Hitler's. It also took exception to the programme's rendering of the history of exploitation by statements like: exploitation had been introduced into Ethiopia in the preceding forty years prior to which the people has exercised self-reliance; at the time the leaders had been close to the people; they had ruled in accordance with the wishes of the people; realising this, the people had looked upon the leaders as their own fathers; and the religious leaders had curbed oppression by the political leaders. The article stated that blaming Haile Selassie for everything was to deny the existence of class contradictions and its preponderance over the centuries. It also pointed out that even if the programme condemned imperialism, its assertion that Ethiopia had never been under its domination was tantamount to denying that imperialism was one of the enemies of the people.

The Democracia Article then took the main principles of "Ethiopian Socialism" to task. It saw the programme's reference to "the precedence of the public good" as posing a contradiction, not between classes, but between the individual and society, which the article scorned as a moral precept. The reference to the "absoluteness of Ethiopia's unity" is condemned as giving precedence to the unity of the country over the independence, rights

and benefits of the broad masses and as being fascist in outlook. The programme's perception of "labour" as hard work rather than as a class of people who live by selling their labour is taken as an indication of a lack of desire to abolish exploitation. Finally, the article pointed out that the programme's reference to "equality" is vague. It explained that, to the bourgeoisie, it means equality before the Law which, in any case, cannot be realized and which cannot do away with exploitation. To the working class, it continues, equality has political and economic aspects which can only be realised by recognizing the political rights of the progressives, resolving national rights democratically, and by nationalizing all the means of production like banks, insurance companies, industries, big commercial companies, and land.<sup>9</sup>

"Ethiopian Socialism" appears to have been envisaged by the Derg as a compromise between the demands of the radical left for a Marxist-Leninist programme, on the one hand, and of the interest groups and voices of moderation, on the other. However, the capitalist class, not to mention the landed gentry, did not have a vanguard organization to articulate its interests and its influence on the Derg remained minimal. When, in the course of 1975, the Derg translated "Ethiopian socialism" into practice by adopting a series of nationalization measures, it was obvious it was implementing the programmes of the radical left. In this regard it is interesting to note the similarities between the suggestions in Democracia concerning nationalization (cited in the last sentence of the previous paragraph) with the 1975 nationalization measures.

"Ethiopian socialism" was, most probably, adopted by an officers' Junta of the Derg and rubber-stamped by the General Assembly of the same body. The tenor of the language is consistent with earlier pronouncements of the Derg and, according to Lefort, the government ministers learned of the programme only from radio broadcasts.<sup>10</sup>

## (A) THE NATIONALIZATION OF BUSINESS ORGANISATIONS

It appears that like the adoption of Ethiopian Socialism, the decision to nationalize the private banks and insurance companies that came soon after it (January 1, 1975) was the decision of the Derg and the Derg alone. Other government agencies do not appear to have been involved in the process of its drafting nor its adoption. The issue before the Derg was very simple: if such an institution was not in the service of the masses, it had to be nationalized.<sup>11</sup> The official explanation confirmed this view. On January 2, the major official newspaper, Addis Zemen, explained that the nationalization of the financial institutions was in order to make them render equal service to the ordinary traders, farmers and workers (presumably meaning equal service with the other classes). This, it was explained, was consistent with Ethiopian Socialism.<sup>12</sup>

The banks that were nationalized consisted of the Commercial Bank of the Addis Ababa Share Company, the Banco di Roma Share Company and the Banco di Napoli Share Company. These three, which were the only private banks in the country, were brought under the administration of the Ethiopian Central Bank like three others which already existed as government banks. A later legislation which merged the nationalized banks under the administration of one bank (the Addis Ababa Bank), stated that their rights and obligations were transferred in full to the new bank so merged<sup>13</sup> and that the capital of the new bank was twenty million Birr (about ten million dollars).<sup>14</sup> From this it appears that the nationalized banks were relatively small and that the assets gained by the state were minimal.

Of the three nationalized banks, the Commercial Bank of Addis Ababa was the most indigenous. The process of its establishment had begun in 1962 when it started off with ten thousand shares valued at about a hundred and twenty-five thousand US dollars and owned by two thousand Ethiopian nationals mostly drawn from the business

community. When two years later a law requiring a minimum paid-up capital of two million Birr (about one million US dollars) was issued, the Commercial Bank of Addis Ababa was able to raise the required amount and register with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry within the same year. The Bank achieved this by attracting foreign shareholders: the National Grindley Bank of London bought 40% of the total shares in 1964 and by the time of the nationalization of banks, 40% of the total shares of the Commercial Bank of Addis Ababa were in foreign hands.<sup>15</sup> The Banco di Roma and the Banco di Napoli were branches of their parent companies in Italy, and, probably, Ethiopian nationals had very little or no shares in them. Further, at the same time, fourteen insurance companies were also nationalised on the same grounds as the nationalization of banks and brought under the administration of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry until such time as a new law redefining their status was enacted.<sup>16</sup> When enacted, the law that was so envisaged provided for the bringing of all insurance companies under the administration of one government agency, namely the Ethiopian Insurance Corporation. The law further provided that the assets, rights and obligations of the pre-existing insurance companies were to be transferred to the Ethiopian Insurance Corporation<sup>17</sup> and that the paid-up capital of the Corporation was eleven million Birr (almost 5.5 million US dollars).<sup>18</sup> Again, not taking into consideration the credits and debts of the insurance companies, the assets that were nationalized were even less important than those of the banks. Figures showing the proportion of foreign investment in insurance companies are not available; however, the Insurance Proclamation of 1970 limited the percentage of total foreign investment in an insurance company to a maximum of forty-nine.

The next to be nationalized were quite a number of commercial and industrial companies. It is not possible to ascertain the exact date but it appears that towards

the end of 1974, the Derg established a high-powered economic policy formulation committee led by Captain Moges Welde-Michael and Aircraftsman Gesese Welde-Kidan (first and vice chairman of the Derg Economic Sub-committee respectively) and had the following as its members: Mebrate Mengistu (Minister of Natural Resources Development), Mohammed Abdurahmin (Minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism), Tadese Moges (Minister of state in the Ministry of commerce, Industry and Tourism), Dr. Debebe Worku (expert in the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Tourism), Tekalign Gedamu (Minister of Transport and Communications), Col. Belachew Jemaneh (Minister of Interior), Tefera Degefe (Governor of the National Bank of Ethiopia), Birihanu Wakoya (Commissioner of the Ethiopian Planning Board), Ashagre Yigletu and Wole Chekol (representatives of the Provisional National Advisory Commission).

The committee held its deliberations in the Ministry of Natural Resources Development and drew up three documents: a general policy concerned with the industrial sector, which is contained in a little pamphlet called "the Red Book", a list of the industrial and commercial organizations to be nationalized, and a preamble to go with the announcement of the nationalization of those organizations. The documents were then submitted to the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing committee of the Derg which approved it with a few amendments of the wording of the texts - amendments concerned with the style rather than the contents of the documents. On the same day, the documents were read to the General Assembly of the Derg and approved by a clapping of hands without any discussions, comments or questions. However, the Ad-hoc Supreme Organising Committee did not allow the reading of the list of the nationalized business organizations to the General Assembly on the grounds that the confidentiality of the list would be betrayed by its members.<sup>19</sup> In spite of this, the organizations were deemed nationalized by the Derg as of February 7, 1975.

Also, the broad outlines of the principles in accordance with which mining, industrial and commercial organizations were to be nationalized was enacted on the same day as "The Government Ownership of the Means of Production Proclamation 26, 1975".

That law delineates between three kinds of mining, industrial and commercial activities. The first were to be owned and operated by the government exclusively<sup>20</sup>, the second to be owned and operated by government and private investors jointly<sup>21</sup>, and the third to be owned and operated by private investors exclusively<sup>22</sup>. The preamble to the legislation explained that the activities under the first category are brought under state control because it was necessary to give precedence to public interest; those under the second category were opened to joint venture because they were not amenable to complete government ownership; and those in the third category were left to the private sector because doing so would not be harmful to society. It was further explained that the basis for the delineation between the three categories was Ethiopian Socialism.<sup>23</sup>

If any of the economic activities under the first category were in private hands, they were to be nationalized.<sup>24</sup> It was in accordance with this principle that the Economic Policy Committee mentioned above short listed a total of seventy-two business organisations for nationalization by the Derg. The undertakings so nationalized were: thirteen food-processing industries, nine leather-processing and shoe-making industries, four printing establishments, eight chemical-processing facilities, five metal factories, and eleven others not classified.<sup>25</sup> Obviously, no mining activities were nationalized because they were almost non-existent and the very few that existed were, in any case, owned and run by the state.

Further, it was provided that the government was to hold a minimum of fifty-one per cent of the shares in each of the joint ventures. If the extent of the value

of its shares in existing joint ventures was less than that, it had to be readjusted accordingly.<sup>26</sup> Such readjustment was taken on twenty-nine joint ventures including eleven food-processing industries, two textile factories, six wood works, one pulp industry, three chemical industries, two metal factories and four petrol stations.<sup>27</sup>

There was no provision for the denationalization of industrial and commercial organizations which, in terms of the law, should have come under the third category. In other words, it was only those undertakings which were considered appropriate for the private sector and which, at the same time, were already in that sector, which were allowed remain in private hands.

The private sector was further delimited by another piece of legislation which was enacted in December, 1975. According to it, retailers were allowed to a maximum capital of about a hundred thousand US Dollars<sup>28</sup>, wholesalers about a hundred and fifty thousand US Dollars<sup>29</sup>, and industrialists about two hundred and fifty thousand US Dollars<sup>30</sup>. Five exceptions were made to these capital restrictions: business organizations which were already in private hands; construction works, surface transport, inland water transport and the publication of newspapers and magazines to be undertaken in the future<sup>31</sup>; wholesalers to be engaged in the sale of agricultural products, skins and hides<sup>32</sup>; and retailers to be engaged in import-export businesses; and those who secure a waiver from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry<sup>33</sup>.

Thus the private sector was allowed to survive the reforms of 1975 and operate within the confines of these rules. There are some within it which are relatively big. An example of this is the Quat Share Company which actually received a waiver from the council of ministers and which exports quat (leaves chewed as drug) to Djibouti valued at about fifteen million US Dollars per annum. Another is the chain of Bekele Mola hotels mostly

in the resort areas of southern Ethiopia which predates the nationalization measures of 1975 and which deals probably with millions of Dollars. The bulk of the others, however, are very small businesses like trucks, buses, taxis, small hotels, bars, barbers, tailors, shops, etc. Usually, one businessman owns only one of these undertakings.

## CONCLUSION

Of the subsectors enumerated in the table below, the only ones affected by the nationalization measures under consideration were: manufacturing; small industries; and banking and insurance, which in 1971 together accounted for less than 9.4 per cent of G.D.P. Among those affected only the major ones were actually nationalized. Even making allowances for the then government's tendency to exaggerate the importance of the modern sector by way of showing its effectiveness, the size of the subsectors affected by the nationalizations was minimal when compared to the share of other sectors of the national economy.

### Gross Domestic Product of 1970/1971 at constant factor cost 1960/1961

<u>Sectors</u>	%	%
<u>Agriculture</u>	52.7	
Industries	15.3	
Mining		0.2
Manufacturing		4.0
Handicraft and small industry		4.1
Building and construction		5.9
Electricity		1.1
<u>Wholesale and retail trade</u>	8.8	
<u>Transport and communication</u>	5.9	
<u>Other services</u>	17.3	
Banking, insurance and real estate		1.3
Public administration and defence		5.3
Educational services		1.9
Health services		0.7
Others		8.2
Total	100.0	

Source: Central Statistical Office, Statistical Abstract.<sup>34</sup>

According to the figures of the Ethiopian Compensation Commission total foreign investments were as follows: Italian - 55%, Dutch 20.18%, American - 7%, British - 5%, Swiss - 3.4%, Austrian - 2.8%, Greek - 2.5%, West German - 1% and Indian - 1%. The following had less than 1% each: Egypt, Japan, North Yemen, Canada, France, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Armenia.<sup>35</sup>

However, although the Compensation Commission has not made available any figures showing the extent of foreign investment, one vague indication of this is the amount paid by the Ethiopian government in settlement of a compensation claim made on behalf of Italian nationals. The Italian and Ethiopian governments were able to resolve through negotiation a subrogation claim of Italy's by reaching an agreement that Ethiopia pay compensation of about 7.5 million US dollars. This implies that if 55% of the total foreign investment (owned by Italians) was 7.5 million US dollars, the total amount of foreign investment was the meagre sum of just over 13.5 million US dollars. If we were to multiply this figure by a factor of two in order to make allowances for the fact that the amount paid in compensation was a result of a negotiated settlement and perhaps does not, therefore, reflect the actual value of assets nationalised, the sum involved would still be insignificant. This is not surprising, however, when we consider that much of the foreign capital inflow was the result of bi-lateral arrangements which were not affected by the nationalization measures. Obviously these estimates are extremely vague; nevertheless, they are the only indications available to show the extent of 'world capitalist penetration' about which so much emphasis is made by writers of leftist persuasion. In fact, a lot of the so-called foreign investors were residents in the country.

Another figure which is often cited by writers on Ethiopia and which goes some way in indicating the amount

of total value of the nationalised assets is found in the statement of Ishetu Chole to the effect that in 1967 75% of the private paid-up capital was foreign owned.<sup>36</sup> Assuming that this was more or less the proportion of foreign and domestic private paid-up capital that was likely to have been nationalised in 1975 and assuming further that the total value of foreign assets nationalised was, as indicated earlier, just over 27 million US dollars, this would give us the total sum of over 36 million US dollars for the value of total private paid-up capital affected by the nationalization of business organisations. Their estimate is, perhaps, not altogether unrealistic if we were to remember the facts noted earlier, namely, that the total capital of all the private banks (which were not nationalised) was about 10 million US dollars, that the comparable figure for the 14 insurance companies was 5.5 million US dollars and that the bulk of the remaining 79 or so businesses that were nationalised were extremely small. Obviously, if we were to use the per capita benefit to the population (which at that time stood at about 32 million) as the index for the need to nationalise the business organisations, the measure taken can only be rejected as having been misconceived.

The benefits of the nationalization measures to the national economy are not obvious either. In the first place, the Derg promised fair compensation to those who lost any assets as a result of the nationalization of the financial institutions<sup>37</sup> and the business undertakings<sup>38</sup>. Quite apart from the cost involved in running a full-fledged Compensation Commission which was established to negotiate with claimants, whatever assets the government gained through nationalization it would, in principle, lose by way of paying compensation. In reality, the bulk of foreign investors were able to claim compensation even if the payments were not necessarily prompt, adequate and effective; Ethiopian nationals, on

the other hand, able to receive any compensation at all did so in dribs and drabs.

Also, one of the effects of nationalization of business organisations has been to bring them under the management of the state; as it transpired, the form of management chosen was central planning of the sort common to the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. From the perspective of the performance of the economy, this assumes that the state administrative machinery involved in the formulation and implementation of plan tasks (the organs of the central government, the middle links and enterprises) is more efficient and productive than the system of company management, a theory hardly ever borne out in practice. Further, it is questionable whether governments would syphon off the surplus from nationalized enterprises and invest it in more productive sectors than would the private owner. Given the civil strife in Ethiopia and the hostile relations of the country with its neighbours, it was more likely than not that it would channel the surplus into sectors chosen for considerations other than economic.

The implication to the workers of the nationalization of the business organisations was minimal; after the nationalization they became employees of the state rather than of the private sector. In principle, the existing law would have entitled the government to disband their unions. In practice, however, the government brought the business organisations that were operating in a sub-sector of the economy under the administration of a sectoral corporation, allowed the latter a degree of autonomy from the ministry to which they were subordinate and authorised the workers in the enterprises to maintain their unions. In December, 1975, a new law was issued politicising and centralising all the existing unions under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

The measures are, perhaps, understood better from the ideological and political rather than the social and

economic point of view. The derg or its leaders saw themselves as carrying out the reforms demanded by the popular uprising of early 1974. With the uprising having died down by the summer of the same year, the only demands that continued to require its attention came from the civilian left. As noted earlier, the civilian left had been urging nationalization of the means of production owned by domestic and international capitalists and hence the abolition of "imperialism" and "national capitalism" in one fell swoop. It appears that this was the most important driving force behind the Derg's nationalization measures - the desire to be seen to be progressive in the eyes of the leftists and win them over to its side.

#### **B. DESAIFICATION OF RURAL LANDS**

The reform of the land-tenure system was by far the most important undertaking of the government, in that it affected the lives of 88.7% of the then thirty-two million population<sup>39</sup>, over 60% of the GDP and 90% of exports<sup>40</sup>, and in that it took the revolution from its urban base to the countryside. The move was in fact more than a reform; it was a radical transformation which was to change the social, economic and political scene of the country substantially.

The pre-1975 land-tenure system was extremely complex and varied from region to region, so that only mention of its main features will be made here. The Highlands, which are amenable to agricultural activities, were over-populated and, hence, subject to extensive fragmentation and subdivision of holdings. About half of the farmers were tenants working under a share-cropping arrangement and the bulk of the remaining were small owner-cultivators.<sup>41</sup> A small percentage of the rural population was landless, they lived among these petty cultivators and worked mainly as farm labourers. Even less important was the commercial farm sub-sector, which emerged as of the late 1960's supported by bilateral and

multilateral aid, and which, by 1975, was using 2,900 tractors and 3,000 irrigation pumps on 480,000 hectares of farmland.<sup>42</sup> The rest of the country, which consisted of arid and semi-arid expanses of the lowland was inhabited by nomads, who were very much part of the rural, if not the crop-producing, part of the population.

Of these, the share-cropping arrangement between the tenants and landlords was the most controversial and politically significant. It was generally believed that the tenants were made to forfeit an unfair amount of their produce to the landlord and the government, which allowed the contract of rent to provide for the payment of up to 75% of the produce, was not doing enough about it. Further, it is often said that the tenants were subjected to feudal dues like working on the landlord's farm and giving him presents on special occasions not least because they sought to ward off eviction. In addition to the fact that the system was seen as unjust, it was considered as going against the promotion of productivity, since, it was believed, it did not give the tenants incentive to produce more because, it was alleged, they lost a lot of the increased produce to the landlord. The most radical criticism of the land-tenure system came from the student movement, which, from the middle of the 1960's, made the slogan "Land to the Tiller" its main rallying call and the attainment of land reform its main target. When, as of 1969, the issue surfaced concerning whether the southern part of the country was not a case of settler colonialism by people for the north, and whether, therefore, the southern tenants were reduced to this status on land which had once been their own, land reform acquired a much greater political poignancy than ever before. Also, academics, governments and aid agencies were very critical of the existing land-tenure system and urged for some kind of reform to be adopted.

One of Haile-Selassie's government's responses to these criticisms was the establishment of a Ministry of

Land Reform and Administration to deal with the matter. One notion promoted by that ministry, well before 1974, was the redistribution of individually owned land in excess of twenty hectares. A draft proposal to that effect was shelved for lack of support in government circles. The fact that the government officials and M.P.'s had their economic and hence political power based on land is often blamed for the obstruction of the adoption of the draft proposal.

As noted earlier, the popular uprising of 1974 brought the question of land reform once again onto the government's agenda. Then parliament asked Endalkachew's cabinet to submit to it a draft legislation on land reform, so that, by the time the Derg took power, the question was already being studied in the Ministry of Land Reform. In doing this, parliament was merely reflecting the popular demand for land reform which had been the rallying call of the Ethiopian student Movement for about a decade and which, in 1974, was being echoed by demonstrators and their placards and by underground papers circulating at the time. No doubt, Endalkachew's response to these demands was to refer the matter to the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration by asking it to come up with a draft proposal. It appears that the tendency within the Ministry was to revive the old proposal of placing a ceiling of 20 hectares on individually owned land and redistributing anything in excess of that to the land-hungry peasants as well as drawing up a tax system which would discourage leaving land idle. It is not clear whether Endalkachew also referred the matter to the Constitution Drafting commission. Nevertheless, articles 136 and 137 of the Draft Constitution which the commission prepared provided for the nationalization of all rural land.

It appears that towards the end of the summer, individuals closely associated with the Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit (an agricultural development package programme launched in a sub-province

of Arsi with Swedish Financial aid) were to be redistributed to peasants in the form of private ownership, each peasant to receive a maximum of 10 hectares. It is said that the radical elements associated with the draft distributed the proposed legislation to the peasants as though it was a government approved law and instigated them to consider the land which they were tilling as their own and to refuse the payments of rent. The Derg, which, from its inception, had been preoccupied with the demands of the civilian left, saw in the draft legislation a means of appeasing them, and, beginning from its seizure of power in its policy declaration of September 13, for instance, it stated that very soon a new land law which would satisfy the requirements of the ordinary farmer and promote crop production would be studied and implemented.<sup>43</sup> This was further elaborated by "Ethiopian socialism" of December 20 which stated that land would be owned by the people.<sup>44</sup> By this time, it was obvious that the more influential officers in the Derg were favouring the nationalization of rural land as opposed to its redistribution in the form of private ownership. One of the reasons for this appears to have been that the Derg had referred the draft legislation prepared by individuals associated with the Chilalo project to a Committee made up of several university lecturers and a famous novelist who, by a majority decision, endorsed the draft legislation with one proviso, namely, that rural land should be nationalised. This solution was also upheld by the radical elements within the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration who had adopted the draft as their own and who were advocating its adoption by the Derg. However, the old idea of redistributing land in excess of 20 hectares in the form of private ownership was supported by the more pragmatic elements within the Ministry and may well have been the official proposal of the Government Department.

The Minister of Land Reform and Administration submitted the two alternative proposals to the Officers Junta but argued strongly against the adoption of the more radical draft on the grounds that it would require a substantial amount of expenditure and administrative substructure to implement, and that, contrary to the Derg's policy of a bloodless revolution, it would entail a lot of bloodshed. This was a voice in the wilderness. The nationalising legislation was supported by the radical elements of the Derg, who had to work hard to persuade the others to their point of view and, at times, even had to invite the drafters from the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration to come and do some of the explaining. In the final analysis the issue before the Officers' Junta was whether its members were on the side of the poor peasants, in which case they should vote in favour of the nationalising legislation, or on the side of the rich, in which case they could reject it in favour of the alternative legislation. The voice of moderation lost the day; the Officers' Junta adopted the radical legislation and had it rubber-stamped by the Derg, and, on march 4, 1975, that draft legislation was adopted as Proclamation 31 of 1975.

According to that legislation, all rural land was declared the collective property of the Ethiopian people.<sup>45</sup> With the exception of large-scale private farms which, in terms of the law, the government could run either as state farms<sup>46</sup> or convert into co-operatives<sup>47</sup>, all privately-owned rural land was to be distributed to people who were willing to cultivate their holdings personally.<sup>48</sup> The intention of the legislation, as far as regards holdings in rist areas, was to transform them directly into co-operatives<sup>49</sup>, although in reality, they were also redistributed like privately owned land. Under the new legislation, the rights of the individual over his plot of land consisted of cultivating it personally<sup>50</sup> and of enjoying the fruits thereof<sup>51</sup>, which together amount to what the legislation

calls "use right". In other words, he does not own his plot<sup>52</sup> which, in any case, belongs to the Ethiopian people and cannot, therefore, transfer it to another person in any way whatsoever<sup>53</sup>.

An equally important facet of the legislation was its drive to organize the farmers into associations. According to it farmers living within a maximum area of 800 hectares had to establish what the law called "a peasant association"<sup>54</sup>. All tenants, landless persons, hired agricultural workers and land-owners with less than ten hectares each were to become members of the association<sup>55</sup>, but land-owners with more than ten hectares each had to wait until land had been redistributed before they could become members<sup>56</sup>. Obviously, this excluded from membership residents who were engaged in occupations other than farming, like artisans, potters, teachers, nurses and the like. The leaders of an association were to be elected by the members<sup>57</sup>. At this juncture, the peasant associations were to be constituted at three levels: all the peasant associations within a wereda were to delegate representatives who would come together and establish a Higher Association at the wereda level,<sup>58</sup> and all the Higher Associations within an Awraja would delegate representatives who would come together and form the Awrala Peasant Association<sup>59</sup>. The legislation did not envisage the establishment of a peasant association at the provincial and national levels at this stage.<sup>60</sup>

There is no doubt that the land reform was the most popular measure adopted by the government and that it was met with an almost universal acclaim. Various sections of the urban population went on massive demonstrations to express their support for it<sup>61</sup>. "Voice of the Masses" called the reform historic and expressed its determination to collaborate with the forces that would struggle to implement it and fight against the reactionaries. Nonetheless, it had a proviso to its acclaim of the reform: it argued that progressives and

the broad masses could emerge victorious only if they were better organized and armed than the reactionaries and that, in order to discuss views and achieve this, they needed democratic rights like freedom of speech, writing, assembly, organisation, and arming. The Derg, it said, had denied these rights but granted land reform which was tantamount to giving meat and denying the knife with which to cut it up<sup>62</sup>.

The only kind word Democracia ever had for any of the Derg members was in relating to land reform. It said that the fact that the privates, the NCO's and some progressive officers of the Derg who were children of the workers and farmers was concrete evidence of their loyalty to their class allies (the broad masses) and they hoped that these pro-people elements would continue their struggle to the last for the fulfilment of the two basic demands, democratic rights and anti-imperialism.

Democracia also criticized the reform for not allowing the people to take power from the bureaucratic capitalists and establish their own government under the leadership of the workers; for giving the land to bureaucratic capitalists rather than the broad masses and, hence, protecting the interests of the petit-bourgeoisie; and for envisaging bureaucratic rather than democratic associations<sup>63</sup>.

Be that as it may, the implementation of the law (the establishment of peasant associations and the redistribution of land) was even more important than its proclamation. Starting from the 1950's, for instance, the ancien regime had been adopting a modern legal system intended to supplant the traditional legal order. In practice, however, both continued to operate side by side with the modern law being followed mainly in the urban centres and the traditional in the rural areas. This "legal dualism" led some academics to be justifiably sceptical about the vigour with which the new government would and could enforce the land reform law under consideration<sup>64</sup>. Despite such fears, the law was not to

remain as a kind of ideal to be achieved at some indefinite date in the future and fall into disuse in the process; it was in fact, fully implemented.

The main function of the peasant associations was, at least in the initial stages, to distribute land to their members as equally as possible<sup>65</sup>. As such, the establishment of peasant associations should have preceded the distribution of land; as it happened, however, both took place simultaneously. The tasks of establishing peasant associations and redistributing land fell primarily upon the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, the Ministry of the Interior, the National Development Campaign and roving members of the Derg who supervised operations. Starting well before the promulgation of the land law, the two ministries conducted short seminars on different types of land reform policies for their existing and newly-recruited employees whom they then deployed in their provincial and sub-provincial branch offices<sup>66</sup>.

Participants of a National Development Campaign, consisting of teachers and students, were deployed in the countryside starting from January 14, 1975, in order to "enlighten" the rural masses about development. Perhaps, what gave the most important boost to the establishment of peasant associations and the redistribution of land was the coming together of the land-hungry peasants and the civilian left (from among the students and teachers) occasioned by the campaign programme. It was noted earlier that, as of September, 1974, the Derg had been finding it difficult to restrain the peasants from taking the law into their own hands and refusing to pay rent to landlords because they believed that law providing for the re-distribution and land had been enacted or was on the verge of being enacted. Also, the focus of the student movement for about a decade had been land reform as exemplified by its most popular slogan "Land to the Tiller". When, as of January, 1975, some 56,000 teachers and students were deployed to the countryside on the

campaign programme, they set about instigating the already convinced peasants to organise themselves, oust the landlords and take the land for themselves<sup>67</sup>. When, in March, the law was finally issued, the campaign participants who were under the influence of the EPRP and, to a lesser extent, under the influence of the AESN, thought of it as an achievement of the "revolution" or that of the student movement, but not that of the government. At any rate, the result of the alliance of the peasants and the campaign participants in particular, but also that of the government agencies concerned in general against the landlords, was to organise four million peasants into sixteen thousand peasant associations by July, 1975<sup>68</sup>, and the bulk of the land considered to be in excess of what an individual farmer was legally entitled to had been redistributed by the end of that year.

The land reform meant different things to the different communities of the rural population. Obviously, big landowners and even those who had holdings of above a few hectares stood to lose from the reform more than other groups, whether they were cultivating their holdings personally or had rented them out to tenants. Although the law had provided that only individually owned land in excess of ten hectares was to be redistributed, in actual fact land owned in excess of a hectare or even less was redistributed in order to accommodate the small cultivators and the landless. In fact, a landowner was entitled to an equal share of land with others only if he was willing to cultivate his holding personally; otherwise, he stood to lose everything. Given the hostility of the poor peasants and the campaign participants towards big landowners, and given the fact that these social elements were in charge of land redistribution, it is doubtful even if this limited right of the ex-landowner was honoured at all in some areas, particularly in the South. More often than not, the landowners were ridiculed as exploiting

parasites and dispossessed of their holdings. In the south, where the landowners were often from a different ethnic origin from the tenants, peasants and the campaign participants even resorted to violence in an attempt not only to oust them from their land, but also to drive the landowners out of those regions altogether.

The overzealousness with which the law was enforced, and the desire of the big landowners to defend their lives rather than to retain their land, drove them to take up arms and go to the woods from where they started threatening beating up and killing those involved in the implementation of the land reform. At any rate, since at that time the government was attributing all forms of resistance in the countryside to the reactionary landlords it is difficult to decide how much of it was perpetrated by landlords because of the land reform and how much of it by them and other sections of the population for reasons unrelated to land reform. Historically, it had been common for law and order to break down during the transition from one king to the next and for warlords to rally local support and assert autonomy against other communities of try and conquer them. In spite of Haile-Selassie's policy of centralization, this tendency was not completely eradicated, especially in the northern part of the country, where, perhaps, the widespread armed resistance in certain sub-provinces of Gondar and Gojjam, was brought about by local notables trying to take advantage of the breakdown of law and order. In some cases, such notables could have been putting up an armed resistance more in support of the deposed monarch than in a desire to effect local autonomy. Also, when law and order broke down, it was common for certain communities to loot one another or nearby towns. In addition, the Derg's imprisonment and summary execution of the officials of the ancien regime drove many to escape to the refuge of their relations in the countryside from where they were able to rally local support and put up armed resistance

against the government. In 1975 and 1976, the EPRP and the Ethiopian Democratic Union<sup>69</sup> also had men under arms operating in the northern provinces of the country and promoting rural dissension against the government more for political reasons than for reasons concerned with expropriating land. At any rate, pitted against the mass of the peasantry, the civilian left and the military might of the government, the landowners had to lose their struggle; by all accounts Ethiopia was cleansed of landlordism, and with it of power and prestige based on land ownership, by 1976.

As noted earlier, the reform affected not only the big landowners (who were, in any case, numerically insignificant) but also the small owner-cultivators who in a lot of cases had about a hectare each. Since normally there was no extra land for redistribution they had to share their holdings with the ex-tenants or the landless on an equal footing. Further, the impact of the land reform on small owner-cultivators<sup>70</sup> was to weaken the control they had over their plots. It has already been noted that the right of the individual owner to transfer his holding to another person was abolished by the reform. This, in effect, meant that, whereas before the reform, the owner-cultivator could sell, pass on by way of inheritance or pledge his plot, he could do none of those things after the reform<sup>71</sup>. Upon his death, for instance, the plot did not go to a person he designated, but to persons specified by law or to the peasant association for redistribution by it to other members<sup>72</sup>. Further, whereas prior to the reform, he could pledge his plot and borrow from either private or public sources, the land had no such value to him after the reform. The diminution of control over his plot, coupled with the constant fear of losing it in the process of collectivizations or the periodic redistribution of land by peasant associations that ensued could only have a negative impact on his desire to make permanent improvements on his land, like irrigation channels,

storage facilities, decent living quarters, barns and the like.

In this sense, the impact of the reform on rist-holders was similar to that on owner - cultivators who together accounted for almost all the cultivation of the arable land in the country. The rist land tenure system prevalent in the northern provinces of Tigre, Gondar (Begemedir), Gojam and Wollo is often treated by writers on the subject as a form of family ownership because it was argued that any descendant of the presumed first settler family in an area now inhabited by an extended family could at any time claim a share of plot(s) from the group, and because it was presumed that land in rist areas was considered extra commercium and hence alienable. The rights of the rist-holder, it is often stated, are limited to using his plot and passing it on to his heirs on his death. In other words, he could not sell his plot and was under an obligation to transfer some of it to a new member of the family who invoked his right to a share of it.

Contrary to these assumptions, however, there is growing evidence to show that farmers in rist areas have, as far back as records go, been selling their holdings, albeit sparingly, because land was the only means of livelihood at their disposal. Moreover, the obligation to give up a part of their rist holding to a new claimant was more the exception than the rule since the pattern of migration was more towards the urban centres than the other way round. The reform Law under consideration failed to recognise the highly individualistic ethos of the rist system and sought to transform "the community of the family" directly into co-operatives rather than redistributing it to individuals. In reality, however, the effect was the same in the cases of both rist and the privately-owned land: land was further sub-divided and redistributed to individual farmers and the control the farmers had over their privately owned land or rist holdings diminished. One possible difference between the



to buy his favour by working on his land by presenting gifts on special occasions and by paying deference to him partly in order to fend off eviction.

The land reform swept away all rents and feudal dues in one fell swoop<sup>77</sup>, and raised the status of the tenants to that of an owner of all his produce. However, the final verdict on whether his burdens were made any lighter has to be postponed until the pre-reform rents and feudal dues are weighted against the post reform taxes, price controls, quota system under which he was made to sell to the government a part of his produce at a price much lower than the market value, obligatory subscriptions to various mass organizations, subservience not to a landlord but to a multitude of government officials, peasant association leaders, and cadres, forced resettlements, collectivizations, villagization, cyclical labour and financial contributions that the new officials exacted from him. These impositions came later and it would be premature to consider them in any detail here.

Apparently, the landless who lived interspersed among the owner-cultivators and tenants were clear beneficiaries of the reform because they were given their own plots in the course of the land redistribution and because it can be presumed that to have a plot of land however small would create a livelihood for them. There are no figures for the landless at the national level, but a 1981 survey, carried out in four weredas in the north-west, the west and the south of the country showed that they ranged between four and seven per cent of the population in those weredas and that they received the smallest plots compared to the ex-owner-cultivators and ex-tenants<sup>78</sup>.

By contrast, the land reform has been irrelevant to the lives of the nomadic peoples like the Afars, Issas and the Sidamo Oromos who together constitute some 6% of the total population<sup>79</sup>. The land law under consideration stated that it was the responsibility of the government,

besides other things, to settle the nomads for agricultural purposes<sup>80</sup>. The wisdom of such a policy is questionable, for various reasons: the nomads inhabit the extremely arid zones of the lowlands which are not amenable to cultivation; the semi-arid zones which they also inhabit can only be developed through capital-intensive projects; settling nomads around ponds, lakes and rivers could expose them to diseases like malaria; alternative development strategies exist; and settlement can only be secured and maintained through the use of force as it is contrary to the way of life of the nomads. The nomads have, therefore, been allowed to continue to roam the vast expanses of the lowlands in search of water and grazing land and fighting off intruders upon land they consider their own as they have done since time immemorial<sup>81</sup>.

Finally, mention must be made of the land tenure system which has survived sixty years of Italian colonial rule and the radical reforms of 1975 and still prevails among the peasants of the Ethiopian highlands. This is what is called "desai" (village ownership) and lends its name to the topic of the section under consideration. The desai socio-economic order is one of the most egalitarian and democratic institutions that has ever been devised. According to the system, access to land depends on membership of the community of the village which in turn depends on two considerations: whether an individual is a descendant of the family that had settled first in the area and whether the individual is a resident in the village or, at least, lives close enough to maintain his ties with it. Every seven years, all the family heads hold a general meeting which is presided over by the state-appointed local judge-administrator known as "chica". After ritualistic sermons by the elders and the priests about past disputes and the need to make peace and start anew, the "chita" nominates three recognised members of the community who in turn nominate twelve others: three to collect tax, three to help

administrate the churches in the village, three to redistribute land and three to ensure that the redistribution is in accordance with established customs and practices. Members of the Assembly can and do criticise the nominees and by acclamation reject any one of them. Those in charge of redistribution then divide the land at the disposal of the village into four parts on the basis of the fertility of the land and on the kinds of crops that can be grown. This accomplished, plots of land are allocated to each member in each of the four parts by the drawing of lots. The rights to the individual over his plots is limited to use-right which lasts for seven years. With minor differences from area to area, this is the outline of the "desai" system of the Ethiopian highlands.

In fact the reform law under consideration failed to make a distinction between the "rist" and the "desai" tenure systems and sought to transform the community of the family (in the case of the "rist" system) and the community of the village (in the case of the "desai" system) into co-operatives. Save in some sample cases, co-operatives have not materialised in either system. In fact, in the case of the "desai" area, the reform made hardly any difference at all. Since the office of the "chica" was abolished, the peasant association filled the gap and presided over the seven yearly assemblies that redistributed land democratically. Both the reform law and the traditional "desai" system gave to the landholder the use-right over his plots. It appears that the reform law has merely replaced the community of the village with the community of the peasant association.

As a matter of fact, the reform law refers to the measure taken under it as "the public ownership of rural land" but since there cannot be any meaningful control of land by the public through its agent (the state) before collectivisation and since collectivisation has proved illusory in the case of Ethiopia, the law has not nationalised but abolished all the pre-existing land

tenure systems and replaced them with a form of "desai" system. Thus, though the reform perpetuated the "desai" system in its homestead (the Eritrean highlands) it was less democratically introduced in the rest of the country because there each peasant association redistributed land more frequently than every seven years and, more to the point, without consulting its members.

Finally, an impact of the reform on productivity needs to be mentioned. By the time of the reform, the arable land of the country had been subjected to extensive sub-division of holdings as a result of population pressure, with about 60% of the farmers having plots of less than one hectare each<sup>82</sup>. In spite of the fact that the land reform legislation provided for the granting of up to ten hectares to individual farmers<sup>83</sup>, it can be presumed that the size of plots actually distributed was, in most cases, either the same as or smaller than the holdings prevalent prior to the reform because the landless had now to be accommodated and the excess land that was nationalized was not enough for any bigger redistribution of land<sup>84</sup>. This assumption is, at any rate, confirmed in the case of four widely distributed weredas by a survey carried out in 1981<sup>85</sup>. This meant, in effect, that, assuming the farmers were in a position to introduce modern technology, the size of their plots would not be able to accommodate such innovations. In this regard, the reform can be accused of intending to tie down the farmers to their traditional agricultural implements, like the hoe, the plough and the farm ox, and hence freeze productivity to the pre-reform level.

It was, perhaps, intended to create a larger scale of farming by bringing neighbouring farms together to work their plots collectively. The reform law under consideration in fact talked of co-operative farms which it defined as "...any farm the possession and administration of which belongs to the farmers using the land"<sup>86</sup>. If this gave rise to the interpretation that

the farmers who belonged to a co-operative could collaborate in some areas while retaining their property rights over their plots, that possibility was dashed by another legislation which was adopted in December, 1975. According to it, the farmers were to bring their labour-force, their plots and their other instruments of production under the control or ownership of the co-operative and work collectively with their interest being limited to a share of the produce on the basis of labour-time contributed by them to the co-operative<sup>87</sup>.

While collectivization could be presumed to solve the problem of sub-division of farm plots, at the same time, it raises a number of other problems of its own and has, in any case, proved illusory in the Ethiopian context<sup>88</sup>.

The scope of the land reform was limited in that it was not meant to address itself to all variables concerned with agrarian development strategy, notable examples being taxes and prices. The reform was primarily concerned with land tenure - with the kind of relationship that should exist between the farmer and his plot and, consequently, also between him and all others. The kind of tenure chosen as appropriate for the post-reform order was the granting to individual farmers of what is called "use-right" over his plot (the right to decide to what kind of use his plot will be put subject to government directives, and the right to enjoy the fruits thereof). Like prices and taxes, however, the type of land tenure system chosen can have implications for productivity, some of which have already been indicated in passing. For example, it has been noted that use-right does not give the farmer as much incentive to make permanent improvements on his holding, nor the facility to pledge it and borrow from private and public sources as does individual ownership of land. Also, it has been indicated that the reform has led to a further sub-division of holdings with negative implications to the farmers' ability to make technological innovations. In view of this, it is perhaps in order to ask why

use-right over sub-divided holdings has been chosen in preference to individual ownership over small or even large farms.

Nationalization of land is in line with the Marxist-Leninist principle of bringing the means of production under state ownership. Once the state is made the owner, land cannot be distributed to farmers in the form of ownership because two owners over one thing is not logically tenable and because the notion of mine and thine does not appear to be a desirable pursuit by Marxist-Leninist. However, use-right, which is chosen as more appropriate than individual ownership, is more akin to traditional categories of property relations and hence belongs neither to socialist nor capitalist relations of production. Its validity in the immediate aftermath of an aspiring socialist revolution rests on its presumed potential to be transformed into some kind of property relation controllable by socio-economic organizations like institutions, co-operatives, communes, or state farms.

It is perhaps unlikely that the full economic implications of such a reform and the complexity of the property relations involved was analysed sufficiently by its drafters in the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration and appreciated in any meaningful way by members of the Derg, with the possible exception of a few. For the drafters it was enough that the reform was in line with what had been done in some other socialist countries, notably the USSR and China, and for the Derg it was enough that it was seen to be doing what the civilian left clamoured for and that the reform was just in the sense that it gave pieces of land to the poor peasants on an equal basis. The reform is, therefore, better understood not from the economic point of view (where it is seen as an agrarian development strategy intended to unleash the dynamics of agricultural productivity), but rather from the ethical, ideological and political points of view.

**(C) THE NATIONALIZATION OF URBAN LAND AND EXTRA HOUSES  
AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF URBAN DWELLERS'  
ASSOCIATIONS**

**i. The Nationalization of Urban Land and Extra  
Houses**

After the nationalization of the business organizations and rural land discussed in the previous sections, the next to be transferred to government ownership were urban land and extra houses. The task of drafting the Law on the subject was entrusted to the Ministry of Public Works and Housing (later known as the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing) in which members of the Voice of the Masses group were dominant. Relevant agencies like the Addis Ababa Municipality and the National Statistical Office provided the data required by the drafting committee and probably participated in its proceedings through representatives<sup>89</sup>. The draft legislation was then submitted to the Council of Ministers who forwarded it to the Derg without so much as discussing it. The Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee wanted to act on it with the greatest possible speed because it sought to pre-empt any underhand dealings by proprietors who had already learnt that the government was about to nationalize land and houses. The Law was finally enacted on July 26, 1975, presumably by the Ad-hoc Supreme Organising Committee since, at the time, a lot of the other Derg members were absent, most were away in the provinces engaged , mainly in the establishment of peasant associations, redistribution of land, and resolving local differences, and some were receiving political training abroad.

The most important provision of the legislation declared that, as of its effective date (August, 7, 1975), all urban land and extra houses would become the property of the government<sup>90</sup>. It provided, further, that

the government would pay compensation for the nationalized extra houses<sup>91</sup> but not for land<sup>92</sup>.

"Extra houses" means those which are in excess of what the legislation allowed a person to own. It allowed a person or a family to own one dwelling house<sup>93</sup>, a house or houses needed to run a business<sup>94</sup>, and/or a dwelling house or houses for employees of an organization<sup>95</sup>. The Ministry of Urban Development and Housing was authorised to determine the actual size of land to be allotted for the construction of a dwelling house<sup>96</sup>, but it was at no time to exceed five hundred square metres<sup>97</sup>. No similar ceiling was placed on the size of land on which business premises or a dwelling house or houses for employees of an organization were to be built; the same Ministry was authorised to determine the appropriate size in each case<sup>98</sup>.

In part this meant that the owner of a house could transfer it to another by way of sale, barter, succession and the like<sup>99</sup>, but he could not do the same to the land that went with the house because that belonged to the government<sup>100</sup>. Nonetheless, when the owner transfers his house to another, his right over the land (referred to by law as "use-right") also gets transferred to the new owner of the house. In the case of a dwelling house, for instance, the parking space, the garden and the play ground, if any, along with the land on which the house is actually built, gets transferred to the new owner of the house. It is as though the land is an intrinsic part of the house and must therefore, suffer the same incumbents.

On the face of it, the implications of the nationalization of rural and urban land appears to be the same. In both cases, land is owned by the state; the rights of the individual over the land allotted to him is referred to as "use-right" (the right to decide to what use the land should be allocated and the right to enjoy the fruits of such decision). Nonetheless, in the case of rural land, the power to redistribute land is given to

the peasant associations; whereas in the case of urban land, such power is vested in the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing. In fact the relevant legislations talk of "public ownership of rural land" and "government ownership of urban land"; but it is not clear whether the differences in terminology are intended to refer to such distinctions. Also, the urban dweller who is allotted a piece of land seems to have more limited rights than does the farmer over his. On the whole, the former can use his land only for the purpose of building a house; once that is done, his land becomes a mere appendage of the house which he loses as soon as he transfers the house to a third party for any reason. By contrast, the farmer has a wider choice of purposes to which he can put his land and whatever he decides to do with the product, the land, which enjoys an independent existence from the products, is his to stay.

Interestingly, the tenant of a government house which has, for example, a garden enjoys the same benefits on the land he possesses as does the owner of a house with the added advantage of not having to pay property tax.

Rural land is "a means of production" and as such its nationalization may be explained in terms of Marxist categories of property relations. Urban land may not be "a means of production"; nonetheless, the preamble of the legislation justifies its nationalization on three counts: to abolish the shortage of land and the soaring of prices caused by the concentration of land into the hands of a few feudal lords, aristocrats, high government officials and capitalists; to abolish the exploitation of the many by the few; and, to abolish tax evasion.

Perhaps, shortage of land, inflation and tax evasion could respond to different kinds of treatments; but the most direct treatment for "exploitation" (by which is perhaps meant the renting of land) is nationalization. The rhetoric of the left was by now beginning to be adopted by the Derg policy statements. If this was the choice of language of the radicals who were drafting the

legislation, the Derg was, obviously, quite happy to pass it as its own.

The nationalized extra houses were rented out to urban dwellers at rates fixed by the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing<sup>101</sup>. Mostly, rents of up to Birr 100 (about 50 US dollars) were to be collected by urban dwellers' associations (UDA) and rents above that were to be collected by the Ministry. All rents were to be used for providing services to urban dwellers in accordance with government comprehensive urban development plans and directives. In other words, UDAS were meant to use the rent they collected for developmental and other matters coming under their jurisdiction: maintenance of rented houses, payment of salaries of UDA employees, common services for their members like latrines, water supplies, roads, kindergartens and basic health facilities. The rent collected by the Ministry was to be used for projects at the level of the cities<sup>102</sup>. According to the preamble of the legislation, one of the purposes for the nationalization of extra houses was control of soaring rents which had caused "...misery to the lives of the urban masses". It achieved this control by following policies of static rents and lax rent collections, particularly of UDA houses. The service envisaged from rent proceeds were pursued with a fair amount of vigour in the immediate aftermath of the reform; since then, however, the pursuit has been abandoned<sup>103</sup>.

A most central purpose of such an urban development policy is the provision of adequate housing for urban dwellers, particularly for those that come within the low-income bracket. Housing can not be said to have been adequate at the time of the reform; but, as the population grew, even more houses needed to be built. The reform recognized this need. It directed the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, in collaboration with the concerned agencies like the Ministry of Finance and the National Bank, to assist urban dwellers to secure loans for the purchase and

construction of houses<sup>104</sup>. In the immediate aftermath of the reform, this led to a flurry of construction of private houses by those who could borrow against the collateral of salaries and other securities; later, however, shortage of land and building materials, and liquidity crisis on the part of the mortgage bank put an end to it. Also, apart from the preambular commitments (like "... provide opportunities of work and shelter for the toiling people..." and "...help them regain their economic, social and political rights...") , the legislation said nothing of substance regarding the problem of how the poor were to acquire houses. All told, the two important impacts of the reform were dispossessing landlords and causing an immediate crisis in the supply of both rented and owned accommodation, effects which were felt with increasing intensity as time wore on.<sup>105</sup>

#### **ii Urban Dwellers' Associations**

The peasant associations and the urban dwellers associations (UDA) are a contribution of the new government to the social and political scene of Ethiopia. These and other mass organizations were the most important forums on which the struggle for power by various factional contenders, including the Derg, were fought out in subsequent years. It is perhaps in order to say a few words on UDAs by way of explaining its essential features as well as those of the peasant associations since they are both fundamentally the same.

It was the same legislation which nationalized urban land and extra houses that organized urban residents into associations which it called "co-operative societies" and later changed to "urban dwellers associations". They were organized at three levels: at the local or kebele, the higher and central levels<sup>106</sup>. The central urban dwellers association in the same municipal council established in each city and the other two exist at the

zonal and district levels of cities and are subordinate to it.

All urban inhabitants were made members of UDA's except ex-landlords who were prohibited from voting in the election of UDA leaders or from being elected themselves for a year<sup>107</sup>. The organs of UDA's at each level included an executive committee, a public welfare committee and a judicial tribunal. The first of these is established through direct election by all members and the other two are then established by the executive committee<sup>108</sup>.

The primary task of delineating the boundaries of and organizing the UDAs was entrusted to the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing<sup>109</sup>. Hence, the Ministry divided the capital city, which then had a population of just over a million, into three hundred kebeles (districts). The city's elections were held on August 24, 1975, leading to the establishment of three hundred executive committees with five members each, three hundred public welfare committees with three members each, three hundred judicial tribunals with three members each and three hundred control committees with two members each. The size of each of the committees and the establishment of control committees were decided by an organizing committee of the Ministry<sup>110</sup>. The establishment of UDAs in the provincial towns and villages did not start until the second half of October<sup>111</sup>. All these elections were concerned with the establishment of kebele UDAs; those of the higher and central UDAs were not held until the next round of general elections over a year later.

Like peasant associations, UDAs are given considerable powers over local matters. As noted earlier, the executive committees of UDAs are authorised to follow up land use and building; set up educational, health, market, road and similar services; collect land and house rent up to about fifty US dollars per piece of land or per house per month; and, spend the rent it

collects and subsidy it receives on building economical houses and on improving the quality of life of its members<sup>112</sup>.

The task of protecting public property and the lives and welfare of the urban population at the local level is entrusted to the public welfare committees which were made accountable to the executive committees of UDAs<sup>113</sup>. The public welfare committees were the equivalents of the defence committees of peasant associations; both later came to be known as "the revolution defence squads".

The mandate of the kebele judicial tribunal is to hear and decide disputes between urban dwellers over land and houses;<sup>114</sup> that of the higher judicial tribunal, between kebele associations inter se and between kebele associations and urban dwellers;<sup>115</sup> and that of the central judicial tribunal, between higher associations<sup>116</sup>. Unlike the judicial tribunals of peasant associations, those of UDAs were not given jurisdiction to preside over criminal offences at least at this stage.

Prior to the reform, these economic, social and judicial functions would have been exercised by officials appointed by and responsible to the government. After the reform, however, those functions were entrusted to UDA leaders (and incidental, to peasant association leaders) elected by and responsible to the people. In a country where prior to 1974 virtually the only elected institution was one of the two houses of parliament (the chamber of deputies), the establishment of UDAs and the granting to them of such powers and responsibilities was an admirable exercise of devolution of power quite consistent with the Derg's principle of "self-reliance" which it reiterated in many of its policy pronouncements and which it enshrined in "Ethiopian Socialism".

However, the responsibility of UDAs to the people is partial in the sense that they are also responsible to the government for certain matters. It has been noted, for instance, that the officials of the Ministry of Urban

Development and Housing that conduct the election of UDAs, give them directives on land-use and building and on the disposal of the rent they collect and the subsidy they receive<sup>117</sup>. Also, even if decisions of UDA judicial tribunals cannot be taken to the regular courts on appeal, the Ministry is empowered to review the decisions of the higher UDA tribunals which are the highest courts within the system<sup>118</sup>.

Further, the Ministry was authorised to designate persons who would organise the records and offices of the UDA courts and who would preside over their proceedings until such time as they became operational<sup>119</sup>.

It is apparent from the preceding provisions that the government's role as far as regards UDAs is more supervisory and educational rather than interventionist and, hence, very different from a military command structure with which members of the Derg are familiar. In an age when most governments would claim, or at least practise some kind of right to guide society towards a goal like, for instance, "economic development" the kind of "parental function" of supervising and guiding of the UDAs that the government assumed cannot be condemned as inappropriate. In the final analysis, however, the democratic content of the devolution of power envisaged in the UDAs rested on the extent to which the election of UDA leaders remained free and the extent to which the government's relations with the UDAs remained parental. As it happened, the popularly elected UDAs were responsible to a government which was not responsible to the people and the powers received by the UDAs were given rather than won and hence could be taken away at will. Subsequent developments, particularly the factional struggle for power, militated against democratic elections, transformed "the parental" into "the paternalistic" and reduced UDAs into instruments of reducing the people into submission.

## CONCLUSION

It appears that the decisions adopted up to the end of 1974 were taken by the Derg collectively and without the participation of ministries and other public agencies. Examples of some of the decisions so adopted were the summary execution of the sixty or so high officials of the ancien regime and others (November 23, 1974), the Ethiopian Socialist programme (December 20, 1974) and the nationalization of private banks and insurance companies (January 1, 1975). At the time, the differentiation between officers and other ranking members of the armed forces and the police within the Derg, between members of the Ad-hoc Supreme Organising Committee and the other members of the general assembly, was in the making. As a result, the imprint made on the decisions by members of that committee would have been substantially greater than by the other members of the Derg.

As noted earlier, the drafting of the policies regarding later nationalization measures was left to ministries and other public agencies to be carried out in accordance with the Derg's principle, enunciated in the Ethiopian Socialist programme, that those economic activities which, if left in private hands, would not go against the spirit of Ethiopia First, should be nationalized, and, in accordance with the precedent set by the Derg in nationalizing private banks and insurance companies. It was on the basis of these vague guidelines that the ministerial committee created for the purpose shortlisted some seventy-one industrial and commercial undertakings as appropriate for nationalization. Obviously, the vagueness of the principle gave the committee some discretionary powers to suggest which undertakings should be nationalized and which not. For example, the bulk of the businesses chosen by the committee as appropriate for nationalization were owned by aliens; on the other hand, however, it could have included on its list all, or most of the businesses owned

by nationals or, alternatively, it could have prepared a shorter list than it did. Given the cursory manner in which the Derg considered the draft concerned with the business organizations to be nationalized and approved it in February, 1975, it is very unlikely it would have rejected any alternative proposals that the ministerial committee might have made.

Compared to the nationalization of rural and urban land and extra houses, which actually affected nationals more than aliens, that concerned with the nationalization of business organizations was moderate. This can, perhaps, be explained by the fact that the committee which prepared the list of businesses to be nationalized was composed of ministers and other high government officials of the ancien regime who were never identified with the radical student movement or any form of radicalism of their own making. Also, the fact that the same list was submitted to the Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee but kept from the assembly as being too confidential, shows the decline in importance of the latter. Obviously, the non Ad-hoc Supreme Organizing Committee members of the Derg, were by then, being treated with less deference than the ministers who were made privy to confidential information.

It was the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration which was entrusted with the task of drafting the policy regarding the nationalization of rural land. There were, as noted earlier, two trends within the Ministry which held different positions on the subject. One advocated the nationalization and distribution of all land individually owned in excess of 40 hectares; the other opted for the mere nationalization of all rural land. However, the Derg was on the side of the latter option; it had already declared nationalization of land as the appropriate agrarian strategy in the Ethiopian Socialism programme and had replaced the minister of Land Reform and Administration who was in favour of the conservative approach (Ato Belay

Abay) by the more radical Ato Zegeye Asfaw. The new minister was later identified as having been a member of one of the Marxist underground organizations (the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Party) and a number of the other members of the drafting committee were identified as having been members of the other radical groups. Even if the more dominant members of the Derg would have had more say on the draft legislation, it appears the discussions on and the adoption of it in March, 1975, afforded the assembly more participation than did the nationalization of the business organizations a month earlier.

The task of drafting the policy regarding the nationalization of urban land and extra houses was entrusted to the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing. The Minister of the department (Ato Daniel) was later identified as having been a member of one of the underground Marxist organizations (AESM). The Affiliation of the Minister suggests that members of the drafting committee would, in most cases, have been drawn from the same underground organization. When, in July, 1975, the draft came to the Derg, it is very unlikely it received a reading beyond the Ad-hoc Supreme Organising Committee. The need to consult the assembly had, by then, faded away and, in any case, a lot of the Derg members were away in the provinces busy helping in the implementation of the land reform policy and in diffusing tension wherever it arose.

The above several paragraphs suggest the existence of a shift by the Derg away from a reliance upon the technical services of bureaucrats to that of cadres, away from the technocrats and University lecturers of Haile-Selassie's government first to radical elements within the state apparatus and then more particularly, to Cadres of (AESM). In this sense, the nationalization of urban land and extra houses was a turning point; from then on, the Derg or the Ad-hoc Supreme Organising Committee was to draw upon the expertise of the Voice of

the Masses group for the adoption of its major policies for a couple of years.

The socio-economic reforms that the Derg was to introduce were completed in 1975; what came after that were minor amendments and follow-up additions to them. The impact of the reforms introduced in the industrial sector were to depose aliens of whatever little investment the country had been able to attract (or the extent to which it had been incorporated into the global capitalist system), leave the insignificant domestic capital intact and transform the workers of the nationalized business organizations into state employees. The impact of the agrarian reform was to transform the semi-feudal relations of production into a kind of state-farmer tenancy arrangement in which the individual farmer is given a piece of land by the land owner's (the state) local agent (the peasant association) - only now the farmer did not have the security of a fixed contract since he had to return the land when the peasant association or state so required. While the tenure lasts, the farmer can only work on his plot, and use the produce as he will. Like the nationalization of rural land, that of urban land and extra houses had as its main target the abolition of landlordism - a target concerning which both reforms were highly effective. The social effect of the reforms was to destratify Ethiopian society which had been divided along property relations. Also, a by-product of these reforms was the establishment of peasant associations and urban dwellers associations which were intended to act as local governments but which actually proved to be more important as forums of political struggle in subsequent years.

Finally, it is clear that the reforms were adopted with Marxist-Leninist ideas in mind. As far as the economy is concerned, this meant that Ethiopia would in due course acquire a centrally planned economic system as, indeed, it did a few years later. However, a more central question was whether the existence of a Leninist

vanguard party is requisite for the adoption of Marxist-Leninist socio-economic reforms in view of the fact that such a party was lacking in the Ethiopia of 1975. If the answer to the question is yes, it would be difficult to call the reforms it would be difficult to see what the role of a Leninist vanguard party is. In other words, the issue of whether, according to the "socialist programme", the adoption of socio-economic reforms can come before the formation of the party or whether the latter should come first and adopt the reforms had preoccupied the Ethiopian left until then and was to continue to do so in the subsequent years. As will be noted in the following chapters, the hidden agenda behind the issue was the aspiration of each of the political organization to create the party under its control or to dominate the party to be formed by them jointly and in this way monopolize or dominate power.

#### FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. Individuals close to Endalkachew's Cabinet confirm a division of the members of that cabinet between Fabians and Conservatives.
2. "The Armed Forces Council Issues a Reminder" Addis Zemen, 34/498, September 4, 1974.
3. See for example "The Wealth Usurped from the Poor People Will be Used in the Service of Ethiopia Again", Addis Zemen, 34/472, August 3, 1974.
4. "The Working Broad Masses of Ethiopia, First!", Democracia, July 2, 1974, p. 1.
5. "All the Ethiopian People Will Determine the Future Government Administration Through their Votes", Addis Zemen, 34/512, September 21, 1974.
6. Addis Zemen, cited in "An Erroneous Choice Leads in a Dangerous Direction", Voice of the Masses, 10, October 22, 1974.
7. "Ethiopian Socialism is declared ", Mimeography, December 20, 1974
8. "Ethiopian Socialism or Scientific Socialism?", Voice of the Masses, 19, January 27, 1975.
9. "What Kind of Socialism?" Democracia, 20, December 25, 1974.
10. Lefort, R, Ethiopia, An Heretical Revolution?, Zed Press, London 1983, p. 84.
11. Individuals closely associated with the Derg confirm this populist tenor of the Derg's debate.
12. "A Decision of the Military Government", Addis Zemen, 34/598, January 2, 1975.
13. Article 4 (1), Proclamation 69, 1975.
14. Article 14, Proclamation 69, 1975.
15. The Ten-Year Achievements and Future Plans of the Addis Ababa, Ababa Bank, Archives of the Ethiopian Central Bank, 1974.
16. See Note 12 above.
17. Article 5, Proclamation 68, 1975.
18. Article 13, Proclamation 68, 1975.

19. Individuals closely associated with the drafting of the policy confirm the procedure adopted by the Derg.
20. Article 2, Proclamation 26, 1975.
21. Article 3, Proclamation 26, 1975.
22. Article 4, Proclamation 26, 1975.
23. Preamble to Proclamation 26, 1975.
24. Article 2 (2), Proclamation 26, 1975.
25. Zewdu Girma Selassie, "Nationalization of Enterprises in Ethiopia: A Study of Domestic Policy Legislation in Practice", Archives of Law Library, Addis Ababa University, Unpublished 1978, Appendix.
26. Article 3(2), Proclamation 26, 1975.
27. See note 25 above.
28. Article 6, Proclamation 76, 1975.
29. Article 5, Proclamation 76, 1975.
30. Article 8, Proclamation 76, 1975.
31. Article 2(2), Proclamation 76, 1975.
32. Article 5 (2), Proclamation 76, 1975.
33. Article 7, Proclamation 76, 1975.
34. Alen Seged Gesese, "Compensation for Nationalized Foreign-Owned Property in International Law with Particular Reference to Ethiopia", Archives of Law Library, Addis Ababa University, Unpublished, 1984, p. 45.
35. Central Statistical Office, Statistical Abstracts.
36. Ishetu Chole, "The Mode of Production in Ethiopia and the Realities Thereof", Challenge, 1970, pp. 2 to 29.
37. See note 12 above.
38. Article 7, Proclamation 26, 1975.
39. Population and Housing Census: a Preliminary Report, The Central Statistical Office of Ethiopia, 1984, p. 15.

40. The 1984-94 National Economic Plan, Archives of the Office of the National Central Planning Committee, 1984.
41. Here no distinction is made between individual ownership and what is called "rist rights", because the literature on the subject does not sufficiently articulate the difference between the two to warrant their treatment otherwise.
42. Bizunek, M. and Mabbs-Zeno, C.C, "The Contributions of the Green Revolution to Social Change in Ethiopia", North-East African Studies, Vol 6, No. 3, 1984.
43. "The Aims of the Derg", Addis Zemen, No. 34/505, 13 September, 1974.
44. "Ethiopian Socialism is Proclaimed", Addis Zemen, No. 34/585, December 20, 1974.
45. Article 3(1), Proclamation 31, 1975.
46. Article 7(1), Proclamation 31, 1975.
47. Article 7(3), Proclamation 31, 1975.
48. Article 4(1), Proclamation 31, 1975.
49. Articles 10(1) and 23, Proclamation 31, 1975.
50. Article 4(1), Proclamation 31, 1975.
51. Article 5, Proclamation 31, 1975.
52. Article 3(2), Proclamation 31, 1975.
53. Article 5, Proclamation 31, 1975.
54. Article 8, Proclamation, 31, 1975.
55. Article 9(1), Proclamation 31, 1975.
56. Article 9(2), Proclamation 31, 1975.
57. Article 12(2), and (3), Proclamation 31, 1975.
58. Article 11(3), Proclamation 31, 1975.
59. Article 11(3), Proclamation 31, 1975.
60. Until the Constitution of 1987, the government administration was structured at the wereda, awaraja, provincial and national levels.
61. See for example, "Teachers the People and the Students Go Out on Demonstration", Addis Zemen, No. 34/650, March 5, 1975; "Permission Granted

- to the Broad Masses to Express their Support through Demonstration", Addis Zemen, No. 34/650, March 5, 1975; and "About 800,000 Residents of Addis Ababa Take Part in Demonstrations", Addis Zemen, No. 34/651, March 6, 1975.
62. "One Does Not Provide Meat Without Knives", 5 Voices of the Masses, No. 23, March 12, 1975, pp. 1 and 3 ff.
  63. "Special Issue", Democracia, (no number), March 9, 1975, pp. 1 ff.
  64. Scholler, H. and Brietzke, P., Ethiopia: Revolution, Law and Politics, Welt Forum Verlag, München 1976.
  65. Article 10(1), Proclamation 31, 1975.
  66. See, for example "The First Chairman Visit The Seminar", Addis Zemen, No. 34/630, February 8, 1975; "222 Persons Receive Letters Appointing Them as Woreda Administrators", Addis Zemen, No. 34/643, February 23, 1975.
  67. For more detail on the National Development Campaign see Section D. below.
  68. A Chapter in Struggle, a special issue of the Provisional Military Administrative Council for the First Anniversary of the revolution day, September 12, 1975, p. 48.
  69. Ethiopian Democratic Union is a Liberal Party created among the white emigrés in 1975.
  70. By owner-cultivators is meant poor farmers who had freehold on their plots and it is intended to include those who had first rights over their plots. With the exception of the insignificant areas where what is called "village ownership" prevailed and where the power of the village as opposed to the individual farmer to transfer land was almost absolute, the power of the individual farmer in "family ownership" areas to transfer his holding was wide enough to amount to individual ownership.
  71. Article 5, Proclamation 31, 1975.
  72. Article 5 and 10(1), Proclamation 31, 1975.
  73. Abstract from Survey by Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, Gilkes, P., The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernisation in Ethiopia, Davidson Publishing Ltd., 1975.

74. See note 33 above regarding surplus appropriation by the upper class in medieval Ethiopia, see: Crummy, D., "Abyssinian Feudalism", Past and Present, No. 89, November 1980 pp. 113-138.
75. Article 2991, 1960, Civil Code of Ethiopia.
76. According to an old employee of the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, only in one sub-province of Wellega were tenants ever charged as high as 75% of their produce as rent.
77. Doctor Taye Gulilat, "The Tax in Lieu of Tithe and the New Agriculture Income Tax: a Preliminary Evaluation", Seminar Proceedings on Agrarian Reform, No. 170. Institute of Development Research, Addis Ababa University, November 25-December 5.
78. Articles 6, 21 and 25, Proclamation 31, 1975.
79. Dessalegn Ranhmato, "Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia: a Brief Assessment", Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Ethiopian Studies, London Ed. Sven Rubinson, 1982, p. 594.
80. The central Statistical Office, Statistical Abstracts, 1987.
81. Article 27, Proclamation 31, 1975.
82. At the time of writing this research (1989) the government has not yet decided whether to settle the nomads or allow them to pursue their time honoured way of life.
83. See note 33 above.
84. Article 4(3), Proclamation 31, 1975.
85. The big commercial farms were not redistributed, but kept as state farms, constituting, according to the 1988/90 Three-year plan of the Ministry of Agriculture, 29% of the arable land, at the time of writing this thesis (1989).
86. See note 41, above p. 594.
89. Article 2(5), Proclamation 31, 1975.
88. Article 8, Proclamation 71, 1975.
89. According to the 1988/90 Three-year Plan of the Ministry of Agriculture, based on the 1984/94

Ten Year National Plan, only 1.6% of the arable land is actually collectivised. As a result the government has been forced to continue to grapple with extension services to the millions of petty cultivators all over the country.

90. No adequate information has been made available concerning the agencies involved in the drafting of Proclamation 4, 1975, which nationalised urban land and extra houses.
91. Article 3(1) and 13, Proclamation 47, 1975.
92. Article 18(1), Proclamation 47, 1975.
93. Article 3(3), Proclamation 47, 1975.
94. Article 11(1), Proclamation 47, 1975.
95. Article 11(3), Proclamation 47, 1975.
96. Article 11(2), Proclamation 47, 1975.
97. Article 5(2), Proclamation 47, 1975.
98. Article 5(1), Proclamation 47, 1975.
99. Article 5(2), Proclamation 47, 1975.
100. Article 12(1), Proclamation 47, 1975.
101. Article 4(1), Proclamation 47, 1975.
102. Article 36(8), Proclamation 47, 1975.
103. Article 36(2) and (3), Proclamation 47, 1975.
104. Since 1975 the rent proceeds have been centralised and each local UDA applies to the central UDA for funds to be expended on local developmental and house repair activities. Usually, they receive about US \$1,000 once in a few years. This has meant a substantial curtailment of their participation in developmental activities.
105. Article 36(1), Proclamation 47, 1975.
106. Ideas have been floating around that the shortage in the supply of houses was caused by their splitting up between family members in order to avoid nationalization, by the presence of a substantial number of foreign soldiers, by the immigration of rural people into urban centres and the like. A closer examination of these, however, has demonstrated that they are not adequate explanations for the phenomena,

making the reform and its effects more suspect. The fact remains, nonetheless, that a great shortage in the supply of houses has ensued from the reform leading to waiting lists for over a decade, causing a great deal of social problems like divorced couples having to share the same house, married couples having to live with relations or in single-room hostels, and Ethiopians abroad having to think twice before returning.

107. Article 22, 25, and 26, Proclamation 47, 1975.
108. Article 23, Proclamation 47, 1975.
109. Article 24(2) and (6), Proclamation 47, 1975.
110. Article 32 and 35(2), Proclamation 47, 1975.
111. "Election of leaders of co-operative societies will take place today", Addis Zemen, August 24, 1975.
112. "Groups which will implement the Proclamation are going to the provinces", Addis Zemen, 1975.
113. Article 24, Proclamation 47, 1975.
114. Article 24(2), Proclamation 47, 1975.
115. Article 27(1), Proclamation 47, 1975.
116. Article 27(2) and (6), Proclamation 47, 1975.
117. Article 27(3) and (6), Proclamation 47, 1975.
118. Article 24(1) and (7), Proclamation 47, 1975.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Transition from an "African Socialism" to a "Scientific Socialism"

When the Derg took power in the summer of 1974, the most important demand of the opposition was the establishment of a Provisional People's Government which would represent more sections of the population than did the Derg and which would pave the way for the establishment of a non-provisional government. If the opposition had had its way, then the Provisional People's Government and/or the non-provisional government that the latter would have created might have been expected to adopt socio-economic and political reforms demanded by the revolutionary movement of the time. Nevertheless, the Derg felt that it could deliver whatever another 'progressive' provisional or non-provisional government could deliver; it, therefore, continued to monopolize power and to adopt reforms, while at the same time promising to hand it (power) over to a government of the people.

Thus, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Derg adopted, in 1974 and 1975, Ethiopian Socialism and, in accordance with this, a series of nationalisation measures with far-reaching social and economic implications. Again, as will be noted in this chapter, in April 1976 the Derg adopted a National Democratic Revolution Programme which gave priority to the establishment of a Leninist Party rather than the formation of a non-provisional government. Ethiopian Socialism can be described as a variant of African socialism and the National democratic Revolution Programme of Ethiopia as a variant of Scientific Socialism; it is with the processes of this ideological shift of the Derg that the present chapter is concerned.

The Derg's change in ideological outlook was influenced in large measure by the leftist political

organisations which surfaced on the Ethiopian political scene as of 1974. Thus, Sections A and B are devoted to describing the political spectrum of the time. The Ethiopian Democratic Union, which is dealt with in sub-section A, was, arguably, a proponent of a middle class revolution; the sub-section is, therefore, at the same time an attempt at explaining why such a revolution did not succeed in Ethiopia. The section also gives a brief overview of four leftist organisations which were important not so much in influencing the Derg's ideological outlook but in explaining subsequent political development. Section B deals with the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party and the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement which were the most important leftist political organisations in their own right and in influencing the Derg to adopt Scientific Socialism. Finally, section C describes the processes by which the Derg adopted the national Democratic Revolution Programme of Ethiopia in response to the challenges posed by the above political organisations. Chapters 3 and 4 have argued that the Derg had no ideological commitment other than nationalism when it assumed power in 1974.

#### **(A) THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS**

##### **i. The Ethiopian Democratic Union**

In the first half of 1974, a middle-class takeover of power seemed quite possible. Endalkatchew's draft constitution envisaged a constitutional monarch and a cabinet accountable to a democratically elected parliament. It was quite likely that he would have wished to become the leader of the cabinet to be constituted in accordance with the new constitution. Under this contingency the government would have been dominated by Haile Selassie's technocrats and would

probably have become more independent of the influence of the traditional aristocrats than ever before.

However, with the Derg's seizure of power in September 1974, and its subsequent falling under the sway of the civilian left, such a possibility dissipated very quickly. By the end of the year it had decapitated the middle class with the summary execution of the highest military and civilian officials of the ancien regime, and by the end of 1975 had broken its economic and political backbone through the nationalisation of the major business organisations, rural and urban land, and extra houses. The insignificant national business community was too small to make a difference and was in any case composed of Ethiopian Moslems who had always found it difficult to participate in the Christian-oriented government of Haile Selassie.<sup>1</sup> The middle-ranking bureaucrats who were active in the popular uprising of 1974 were later forced to tow the line of the Derg and the civilian left.

It has already been noted that, according to the Derg, the main reason for its establishment was the need to arrest and bring to justice the officials of the ancien regime, who were allegedly corrupt and hence responsible for the backwardness of the country. In the aftermath of its establishment, therefore, it carried out waves of arrests of such officials, and those who managed to evade the arrests fled to the safety of the countryside and from there to the neighbouring countries and beyond. Many ended up in western capitals where they met up with those who had defected from Ethiopian embassies abroad and defectees from government missions.

The most important western capital for the white 'emigres' was London, to which the Crown prince, Merid Azmach Asfau Wosen, had moved towards the end of 1974, from Switzerland, where he had been under medical treatment since before the time of the popular uprising of 1974. It appears that initially the Crown Prince was a rallying point for the 'emigres'. At any rate, it was

in London that the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) was established, issued its publications and where its recognised leaders lived and operated from. The date of its establishment can be traced to March 1975 when the Chairman of the organisation, Lieutenant General Eyasu Mengesha, made EDU's manifesto public for the first time.<sup>2</sup> However, EDU did not start issuing its organ (EDU Advocate) until December 1975, and its programme (Aims and Objectives of EDU) was not published until the summer of 1976.

EDU claimed that its membership consisted of all Ethiopians, whatever their class, nationality or ideology, so long as they were opposed to the Derg. In particular, the peasantry, who have on their own accord established themselves in opposition to the Derg and have come in under the umbrella of EDU' were seen as forming 'the broad base of EDU'. It has been suggested above that the leadership of EDU was drawn from the white emigres who fled the country in the aftermath of the Derg's onslaught on the high civilian and military officials of the ancien regime. In the words of EDU's programme, the leadership was composed of 'traditional leaders' at whose '...side are ranged an educated core of modern Ethiopians, international civil servants, military officers, businessmen, diplomats, educators and government administrators'.<sup>3</sup> EDU saw itself as providing a command structure for all the forces opposed to the Derg. The highest organ in its structure was a supreme council with the mandate to formulate policies. It had 17 members, each of whom apparently represented the different regions of Ethiopia. The responsibilities for implementing the decisions of the supreme council, and for running the day-to-day activities fell on the executive committee, made up of eight members.<sup>4</sup> The chairman of both organs was the Eritrean Lieutenant General Eyasu Mengesha, who had been the Ethiopian ambassador to London until he defected some time towards the end of 1974. Two other well-recognised leaders, Ras

Mengesha Siyūm and Brigadier General Nega Tegegn, came from the neighbouring provinces of Tigre and Gondar respectively. They were recognised as leaders of EDU's military operations in the north-west and north and both were grandsons-in-law of King Haile Selassie.

Like many of the political organisations that emerged in the post 1974 period, EDU shied away from calling itself a party. It saw itself as a movement which did not 'covet power for itself'. Its primary task, it maintained, was the overthrow of the Derg through political and military struggle.<sup>5</sup> As soon as this was accomplished, EDU proposed to convert itself into 'a transitional administration for a fixed period' and at the same time to establish an elected 'constituent assembly' which would draft a new constitution to be ratified by the people. Pending the adoption of the new constitution and the handing over of power to the government which would be constituted in accordance with that constitution, the transitional administration (EDU) would return the security forces to their normal duties, revitalise the command structure within the armed forces, maintain law and order, protect members of the security forces from reprisals by the public, repeal all Derg laws, guarantee freedom of speech, assembly and association, organise and administer the economy on an emergency basis, negotiate with Eritrean representatives, grant amnesty for political prisoners and Ethiopian refugees abroad, re-open schools and institutions of higher learning, and despatch goodwill missions to friendly neighbouring countries.<sup>6</sup>

All these would appropriately fall within the competence of a provisional government, but there were others which seemed to require a long period of time to accomplish. For example, EDU argued that democracy and the creation of autonomous units within a federal structure were at the forefront of the demands of the 1974 popular uprising<sup>7</sup> and that these, together with land reform (the distribution of land to peasants in the form

of individual ownership) constituted the three pillars of its programmes.<sup>8</sup> Further, EDU sought to secure the smooth functioning of the economy and the mobilization of the national work force and thereby solve the problems of inflation and unemployment.<sup>9</sup> Finally, EDU declared that it was committed to freedom, human rights and equality.<sup>10</sup> This perhaps suggests that, contrary to its assertions, EDU saw itself as a party; that it had an ideology (a pluralist political and economic order) which it sought to impose on the Ethiopian people; and that it had designs to launch itself as a non-provisional government after the overthrow of the Derg.

These allegations may be dismissed on the ground that its stated aims and objectives were matters it sought to advocate rather than impose on the people; what was more difficult to dismiss, however, was the allegation against it that it was restorationist (that it sought to reinstate monarchy and to de-nationalise land, extra houses and businesses that had been nationalised by the Derg). Here there is, perhaps, a case for arguing that EDU was more of a reformist than a restorationist organisation. Most of its members, like for instance, the educated Ethiopians, international civil servants, military officers, diplomats, educators, government administrators and businessmen, were not part of the aristocracy; they were technocrats whose interests did not depend on traditional institutions such as a feudal land tenure system, birthrights, personal rule and the like. It is very likely, therefore, that EDU was sincerely committed to the policies cited above, like freedom, democracy, federal government and land reform based on private ownership.

It appears that the question of reinstating the monarchy after the overthrow of the Derg was raised by the founders of DEU and rejected because it was supported only by the Shoan aristocracy who were very much in the minority. The group that finally emerged as EDU was dominated by Northerners who were traditionally not much

committed to the Shoan dynasty, even though some among them were aristocrats. An outstanding example of this was Ras Mangesha Siyum, who, though a grandsons-in-law of King Haile Selassie, was recognised in his own right as a descendant of the Tigrean Emperor, Yohannis the fourth, and as a great reformer who often asserted his independence from the central government in ruling his province of Tigre. It is more likely than not that, given his temperament and zeal for reform, he might have fancied himself as a president rather than a king should the question have arisen.

If EDU had had its way, it would certainly have undone all the nationalisation measures of the Derg and reinstated private relations of production at least to the previous level. In the Marxian sense, this would perhaps have amounted to turning the clock back, but would not amount to reinstating feudal relation of production and an aristocratic style of government. In view of this, EDU was perhaps genuinely committed to its statement that it was

"...based on a fundamental conviction that the demise of feudal rule can only be replaced by a democratic reconstruction of the nation. No alternative is possible or desirable for Ethiopia and its development." 11

Even though the members of EDU were too closely identified with the ancien regime, which affected their credibility, the organisation nevertheless was at best as effective as any of the pan-Ethiopian political organisations in putting up resistance to Derg rule.

According to its policy statements, EDU's first and most important task was overthrowing the Derg, which to it was a 'fascist regime',<sup>12</sup> which had deprived the popular movement of its aspiration to democratic rule.<sup>13</sup> The Derg's programme of Ethiopian socialism is, EDU asserted, "...a slogan meant to dress its terrorist rule in a respectable robe..." and is "neither Ethiopian nor socialist; it is a simplistic device intended to

hoodwink progressive Ethiopians and world public opinion."<sup>14</sup> Further, it argued that the land reform of the Derg was hastily improvised and muddled, deprived the peasants of ownership of land, herded them into communal arrangements and rendered them vassals of the state; and that the nationalisation of urban houses deprived thousands of Ethiopians of their major source of income.<sup>15</sup>

It is for considerations like this that the EDU said that it sought to overthrow the Derg; the means chosen to achieve this were political and military. As far as its political strategy was concerned, EDU attempted to expose the Derg internationally and domestically.<sup>16</sup> The conservative Islamic states of the region (Saudi Arabia, North Yemen and Sudan in particular) had been growing uneasy about the increasingly leftist stance of the Derg. What is more, Ethiopia was implicated in a July 1976 attempted coup against El Numeiri of the Sudan.<sup>17</sup> In September 1976, the leaders of EDU were discussing a common strategy with Ali Mira (the traditional leader of the Afar people and their recently created 'Afar Liberation Front') and the leaders of the conservative Eritrean secessionist organisation (the Eritrean Liberation Front.) The venue was Jeda (Saudi Arabia).<sup>18</sup> These developments brought EDU close to the conservative states and movements within the region, and particularly to the Sudan, which later allowed it to use its radio station to broadcast hostile propaganda, against the Derg. No doubt EDU also benefited in terms of military aid from the same sources.

As far as its military strategy was concerned, EDU declared that even though its members were familiar with guerilla warfare, it would go for a swift victory because that would not have detrimental consequences for the country. It argued that a majority of the Ethiopian people and a section of the army were opposed to the Derg and that EDU need only provide united command for the opposition.<sup>19</sup> As early as November 1975 it was reported

that lieutenant General Eyasu Mangesha, Ras Mangesha Siyum and Brigadier General Nega Tegegn, had met in Nega (in the north-west province of Gondar near the Sudanese border) in order to plan military operations. <sup>20</sup>

In May and June 1976, EDU was in a position to harass the Ethiopian army and help bring about the defeat of a peasant march against Eritrea, launched by the Derg <sup>21</sup> and to engage and, at times, defeat isolated military garrisons in the provinces of Gondar, and Tigre. <sup>22</sup> However, the major confrontations between EDU and military forces of the Government did not start taking place until 1977, when the former was able to capture towns and sub-provinces in the north-western part of the country near the Sudanese border.

Prior to 1974, most Ethiopians in the modern sector would probably have chosen to live in a pluralist socio-economic and political order. However, there were no political organisations advocating such an ideology, mainly because Ethiopia had not been exposed to Western political processes or ideas; less touched by these than even the ex-colonial countries of Africa. The most that had been achieved in this regard was the incorporation into the Draft Constitution of Endalkatchew of a provision that would have allowed the establishment of more than one party had it not been abolished by the Derg. The emergence of EDU was a belated attempt at instituting a pluralist socio-economic and political order, which was doomed to failure from the start because its adherents were identified closely with the ancien regime, which was by then totally discredited; because they were seen as trying to avenge their associates who had been executed by the Derg; and because the organisation, being primarily based outside the country, had limited influence over the people.

The two most important political organisations, called the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM) will be discussed in the following section. This sub-section is

concerned with four other leftist political organisations, which were not very important in influencing the Derg's shift of ideology, so much as in determining the outcome of political development in the subsequent years. There is no need to go in any amount of detail into their own ideological dispositions, since they had nothing new to offer other than what will be discussed in the following section in relation to EPRP, AESM and the Derg's adoption of the National Democratic Revolution Programme (NDR) in April, 1976.

The political organisations concerned were the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organisation, the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle, the Worker's League and Revolutionary Flame. The leaders of these organisations, with the exception of those of Revolutionary Flame, were active participants in the Ethiopian Student Movement, which will be discussed in Section B; in that sense, the origins of the organisation can be traced back to the student movement of the 1960s and early 1970s. There was, nevertheless, a new breed of Communists drawn heavily from the army as of 1975 (trained either by the veterans of the Ethiopian Student Movement in political study groups and in the new Yekatit 1966 Political School, or in the socialist countries) upon which the Workers' league and the revolutionary Flame were dependent for the bulk of their membership.

#### **ii. The Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Movement**

The Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Movement's paper (Independence) was launched in December 1975 and the first issue contained the programme of the organisation. With the issuance of the national Democratic Revolution Programme in April 1976 which treated existing groups as political organisations which had to form a joint front in order to bring about a fully-fledged party, the organisation under consideration

had to change its name from 'party' to 'struggle' in September 1976.<sup>23</sup>

The leaders of that organisation were active participants in the Ethiopian Student Movement of the 1960s. The original cell of the organisation may well pre-date the 1974 uprising,<sup>24</sup> though, like for all the organisations the events of that and subsequent years were an impetus for its accelerated growth.

The main difference between the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggles and the other political organisations appears to have been the emphasis that the former placed on the 'oppressed nations and nationalities' of Ethiopia. In fact, on that question its programme reveals nothing different from what the other organisations state; but it is common knowledge that the organisation saw itself standing for the cause of the oppressed 'nations' and nationalities more than the others. The bulk of its leadership, including its Chairman (Baro Tomsa), were from the biggest linguistic group in the country (Oromo). However, there was a sprinkling of individuals from the minority linguistic groups of the South in its ranks. It is doubtful if membership was open to other nationalities, especially to the more dominant linguistic group of the Amharas and Tigreans.

It appears that the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Struggle differed from the Oromo secessionist movement in that it believed in the continuation of an ethnically and religiously more just Ethiopia. Thus, like the other political groups under consideration the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle was arguably pan-Ethiopianist; unlike them, however, it probably sought to subordinate the class question to the national question, or at least gave the latter more prominence than did the other organisations.

### **iii. The Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organisation**

By the end of 1975, the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organisation had started issuing its paper, *Revolution*<sup>25</sup>, but its programme was not made public until December 1976.<sup>26</sup> Some sources suggest that the organisation was established as AESM's Youth League, and later broke away; others have maintained that AESM launched it deliberately in order to promote its own cause under the guise of another organisations. These suggestions appear to be the result of the fact that the two organisation were working very closely with one another at a later stage; the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist organisation's Programme, for instance, states that the two had already formed a joint front, and that they were issuing a joint paper called *Truth*<sup>27</sup>.

However, there is evidence to believe that, like EPRP and AESM, the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organisation was an offshoot of the Student Movement and particularly of the latter's strategy, as of the early 1970's, of promoting political study groups in student circles. One such was established by a group consisting mainly of law students led by Ayed Ahmed, the Editor of the Addis Ababa University Students' Union paper, *Struggle*. It appears it was this group that later developed as an independent political organisation propelled mainly by the upsurge of political activities as of early 1974. Both the members of the organisation and its leaders were generally younger than their counterparts in other organisations.

### **iv. The Worker's League**

A Dr. Senaye Likke was the leader of the Ethiopian Students' Union in North America in 1971, and in August of that year he, and thirteen others, walked out of the Nineteenth Congress of his Union because it rejected its Seventeenth Congress decision that the national question

in Ethiopia was of a regional character. The reflection of the decision was at the instigation of the newcomers from Ethiopia who later formed the EPRP and against the wishes of the Ethiopian Students' Union of Europe which later formed AESM. Senaye's walk-out alienated him from the newcomers as well as from the Ethiopian Students' Union of Europe; the newcomers had ousted him and taken over his position, and the Ethiopian Students' Union in Europe had lost the support of the Ethiopian Students' Union of North America.

Later he completed his studies and returned to Ethiopia in 1972 when he started working for the Pasteur Institute in Addis Ababa. At the same time, he started teaching the air force cadets in Debre-Zait some 50 kilometres outside the capital on a part-time basis. This brought him into contact with the air force personnel and through them with members of the Derg when that was created in 1974. It is often acknowledged by people close to the government that Senaye was quite close to the Derg in its early days and that later he was involved in teaching Marxism and Leninism to Major (later Colonel) Mengistu Haile-Mariam and his group in the Derg.

It is not known exactly when Senaye established his political organisation (The Workers' League) but its paper (Workers) was in existence at least as of late 1975, and its programme was made public in July, 1976. In a pamphlet he wrote at the end of 1976, Senaye endorsed the positions of AESM discussed in the following section, glorified the victories of the 1974 'revolution' of Ethiopia and attributed the 'achievements' of the Revolution to the Derg much less grudgingly than did AESM<sup>28</sup>.

The members of the Workers' league were partly recruited from among partisans of the Ethiopian Student Movement but mostly from among the army. The organisation had cells in the various military units and it had absolute control of the Debre-Zait Air Force where Senaye was apparently worshipped. Recruiting members of

the armed forces and the police was a departure from the practice of the other political organisations; the latter all seem to have shied away from recognising members of the security forces as a revolutionary class in terms of Marxism-Leninism.

#### **v. Revolutionary Flame**

Revolutionary Flame's programme was launched in August 1976 and its paper, *Seded* (Flame), does not seem to have pre-dated the issuance of the programme by more than several months. If this is correct, Revolutionary Flame would be the last of the political organisations to have come into existence; it was perhaps established some time in early 1976.

Apparently, during encounters between Major Mengistu and AESM leaders, the latter were accustomed to giving weight to what they were saying by reminding him that they were speaking on behalf of an organisation. Major Mengistu needed no reminding; it was clear to anyone that AESM was using the official forums (like the mass organisations, and, later, POMOA and its branches, and discussion groups in all offices) to recruit members and grow by leaps and bounds. It seems that Senaye, who also feared AESM's domination, and Mengistu got their heads together and came up with the idea that the latter should create his own political organisation and that Senaye would provide him with the necessary cadres to help in the endeavour. The result was Revolutionary Flame.

Apparently, it was difficult for the cadres of Revolutionary Flame and the Workers' League to see the difference between the two organisations since they were being instructed by their headquarters to work together closely. Also, people far outside the two organisations often claimed that Revolutionary Flame was merely the armed wing of the Workers' League. If this is correct, the claim often made that Major Mengistu was a member of AESM cannot hold water (except perhaps for the period prior to 1976), unless of course he was simultaneously a

member of AESM and Revolutionary Flame as well as the Workers' League, which would not be an unusual practice for the time.

It was Major Mengistu and some 13 of his supporters from the Derg that first established Revolutionary Flame. At the time, Major Mengistu was the first Vice-Chairman of the Derg and as of February 1977 he became the uncontested leader of the country. Consequently, to become a member of Revolutionary Flame meant to be secured and privileged - a fact which helped the organisation to attract many members and to become powerful after that year.

**vi. THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY  
(EPRP) AND THE ALL-ETHIOPIAN SOCIALIST MOVEMENT  
(AESM)**

Unlike the origins of EDU those of the other pan-Ethiopian political organisations that sprung up in the 1970's could be traced, directly or indirectly, to what came to be known as the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) of the 1960's. EPRP and AESM, to which the previous chapters have been referring as the 'Democracia Group' and the 'Voices of the Masses Group' respectively were the most important and direct descendants of the ESM.

The origins of ESM have been traced to the late 1950's, but it was not until the mid-60's that it acquired the organisational and ideological poignancy with which it was able to mobilise the University and later the school students and conduct an effective campaign against Haile Selassie's government. By then there were at least three main branch unions of ESM, operating independently of each other. Two of those were the Ethiopian Students Union of North America (ESUNA) and The Ethiopian Students' Union of Europe (ESUE), composed of students who went there for further studies. Less important unions also existed among students in North

Africa and Eastern Europe. The third important union, the Ethiopian University Students' Union of Addis Ababa (EUSUAA), representing all the colleges in the capital city, emerged as the dominant student union in the country after years of struggle against the students' union at the national level.

Towards the end of the 1960's all the branches of ESM advocated Marxism-Leninism as the correct ideology to be pursued by them as well as by Ethiopia. It is not easy to attribute this trend to one specific cause or another. However, the anti-West backdrop of the 60's (the revolutionary movements in latin America, the anti-Israel, anti-West struggle of the Palestinians, and anti-imperialist war in Indo-China, and the general student movement in the West) could only direct ESM toward the goal of struggling for the violent overthrow of the existing order. The organs of ESUNA and ESUE (Challenge and Struggle respectively) clearly showed the identity of ESM within these global movements.<sup>29</sup>

The trend within EUSUAA was the same. A certain amount of Marxist literature was available in the libraries, and those who had contacts received more of it from unions in Western Europe. These and various pamphlets from China and North Korea were freely circulated among students and read by them avidly, often at the expense of their academic careers. A lot of the school and university instructors from the West, who tended to identify themselves with the global movements, were sympathetic to and, in the case of the Marxist among them, advocates of the trends within the student movement. Under the influence of factors like these, EUSUAA deliberately abandoned corporatist demands (like better food, better living quarters, better representation in the university administration ) in favour of struggling for matters of national importance. It mobilised the university and school students into holding frequent rallies, demonstrations, class boycotts and into the distribution of anti-government leaflets.

The main demands, often echoed by these militant actions, included 'Land to the Tiller' (as of 1965) 'National Self-Determination up to and Including Secession' (as of 1969) and democratic rights. By 1969 Marxism-Leninism had become the official ideology of ESM; EUSUAA which was at the forefront of the struggle against the ancien regime had become its most militant advocate.<sup>30</sup>

In December, 1969, the EUSUAA leader (Tilahun Gizaw) was gunned down outside the main university campus. On the next day tens of thousands of university and school students held a rally in the campus and, with the aid of slogans, chants and placards, vilified the government, which they held responsible for the death of their leader. The focus of the rally was the corpse of the victim, which the students got hold of and refused to release either to the authorities or the relations. In spite of many hours of toing and froing between government representatives and student leaders no resolution to the problem was in sight. Then the soldiers who had been positioned within the campus, fired a volley of shots into or in the direction of the crowd (it is not clear which), and, in the commotion that ensued, they pursued the dispersing students, bayoneting the bottoms and legs of those they caught up with. The extent of the casualties has since remained a matter of speculation. <sup>31</sup>

In previous years the Government's measure against ESM had been limited to several days of detention accompanied by a certain degree of physical hardship, mainly intended to discipline the students. The events of December, 1969, however, indicated to the students a change in Government policy towards them: a change away from a paternalistic approach by the King to a heavy-handed policy intended to crush the movement. The measures did not quell the movement; it continued with greater ferocity, not least because it had the advantage of martyrs to dramatise its cause. One thing was true, nonetheless: greater numbers of students started going

abroad on scholarships, partly because the educational system in the country was often being disrupted by student activism, and partly because it was now too dangerous to continue the struggle from within Ethiopia. Some of the hard core of EUSUAA left the country by hijacking planes, others by trekking across the country-side. The new arrivals did not like what they found among students abroad. To them the students abroad were neither sufficiently committed to the cause of liberating Ethiopia nor followed the 'correct' Marxist-Leninist line on various questions. The adherents of ESUE and ESUNA tended to look at the new arrivals as infantile romantics, lacking in the rigours of Marxist-Leninist discipline. The effect of this was to divide the ESM into at least three recognisable factions: the new arrivals, led by Birhane Meskel Reda, who hijacked, with others, an aircraft from Ethiopia to the Sudan; ESUE, led by Haile Fida in Paris; and a wing of ESUNA, led by Senaye Likke in the United States.

The first and most important controversy arose over an article on the national question written under the pen-name of Tilahun Takele, but widely believed to have been the work of Birhane Meskel Reda. The new arrivals, who were attempting to dominate the students movement abroad, supported the thesis of the article, while ESUE and a section of ESUNA opposed it. The main difference appears to be between those who wanted to treat the centrifugal tendencies in Ethiopia as national questions (the position of Birhane Meskel's group) and those who wanted to treat them as regional questions (the position of the veterans of ESM abroad). The issue was submitted to ESUE's eleventh congress in August, 1971, (West Berlin) and the position of Birhane Meskel's group won the majority. The eleventh congress was attended by the leaders and prominent members of all branch unions. Within a week of the Berlin conference, ESUNA held its nineteenth congress in Los Angeles and reversed its decision on the national question adopted at its

seventeenth congress, in order to go along with the position of Birhane Merkel's group. Disappointed with the outcome, Senaye Likke (President of EDUNA) walked out of the meeting with thirteen supporters, thus effecting the first faction within ESM;<sup>32</sup> later he created his own political organisation.

It appears that as early as 1970 Birhane Meskel's group had floated amongst ESUE's leaders, including Haile Fida, the idea of launching a Communist party which would wage rural guerilla warfare against Haile Selassie's government. However, neither side could see eye to eye on the question of timing nor on the nature of the party to be established. Despite that Birhane Meskel's group went ahead, and in 1971 created a provisional organising committee which would prepare the ground for creating a party. Encouraged by its success in dominating the Ethiopian students abroad and in pushing through its thesis on the national question, the provisional organising committee held a founding congress from 22 to 29 of April, 1972, and adopted the constitution and programme of the party. It was decided that the real name of the party would be the Ethiopian Communist party, and that in its external dealings it was to be known as the Ethiopian People's Liberation organisation. For the sake of simplicity, the party will be referred to from now on as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party, which is the name that the organisation adopted as of August 1975. The congress elected members of the central committee and Birhane Meskel as its general secretary; in turn the central committee elected members of the politburo. It was further decided that the minimum programme of the party would be the consummation of the new democratic revolution and that the Leadership would initiate a guerilla unit which would raise a people's army from among the peasantry and wage protracted warfare in three stages: the strategic-defensive, the equilibrium and the

strategic-offensive. In this way, it was believed, the cities would be encircled and finally fall. <sup>33</sup>

The beginnings of the foundation of AESM can be traced to a 1969 meeting in which the question of creating a political organisation was discussed. The first chairman of that meeting was apparently Hagos (a veteran activist of ESUNA) and the second was Haile Fida of ESUE. It appears that Hagos fell out with the group, leaving Haile Fida to carry on with the task of leading the organisation. If the events of those early years did not amount to the formation of AESM, there is no doubt that Haile Fida established it at about the same time as the foundation of EPRP or soon after. The kind of effective resistance that ESUNA put up against the onslaught of EPRP after the national question was discussed in 1971 can only be explained in term of an organised response. There was a lot to be done: writing of polemical essays, printing and distributing pamphlets, preparing and defending positions at the emotionally charged meetings of the congresses. All these were conducted on a bi-partisan basis.

An example of this was the question of mobilizing the Ethiopian students abroad into joining one side or the other, which was the preoccupation of both organisations at that time. EPRP took the initiative of proposing the establishment of federal structure among the branch unions of AESM to replace the previous and loosely organised structure of the World-wide Union of Ethiopian Students. ESUNA, which had come under the sway of EPRP, adopted the idea of federation, but ESUE resurrected it until its 14th annual congress in August, 1974 (West Berlin). By then the Ethiopian students abroad were polarised into supporters of the World Federation of Ethiopian Students (called Federationists) and opponents of the idea of federation (called Europists). The differences between the two were so hostile, personalised and aggressive that they could no longer share a common platform after the fourteenth

Congress; the two organisations never met together after that.

Despite the hostility and downright hatred towards one another, both Federationists and Europists, led by EPRP and AESM respectively, professed Marxism-Leninism as the correct ideology for their organisations to pursue. Nevertheless, there were substantial differences between them. Besides their differences of the national and federal questions already alluded to, there was the additional issue of who had led the early 1974 popular uprising which proved intractable at the ESUNA 14th congress. To the Federationists, it had been the workers that led the uprising; to the Europists, it had been the petit bourgeoisie that led it.<sup>34</sup>

The early 1974 popular uprising that exploded on the Ethiopian political scene was as much a surprise to EPRP and AESM as it was to everyone else. Like EDU, both organisations were established abroad and the target of their activities until 1974 had been the Ethiopian students abroad whom, as indicated earlier, they managed to mobilise extensively. Due to limited presence in the country the organisations were unable to give the popular uprising any kind of leadership; on the other hand, however, the uprising confronted them with the challenge of having to integrate themselves not only with Ethiopians abroad but also with the progressive forces and the masses in the country. In the following few years, they took up the challenge successfully, but only at the expense of polarising the nation as they had already polarised the Ethiopian students abroad.

By July 1974, the central committee of EPRP had returned to Ethiopia and launched its organ Democracia. Even though the central committee of AESM did not return to Ethiopia until early 1975, it had sufficient followers within the country to live up to EPRP's challenge and institute its own organ, Voice of the Masses, in August 1974. As amply demonstrated in the previous chapters both organisations used these organs to advocate the

abolition of the crown, to condemn the Derg as a fascist junta dictatorship, to demand the immediate replacement of the Derg by a People's government, to instruct the literate population about Marxism-Leninism etc. Surprisingly enough their positions on these and other issues were almost identical until at least the summer of 1975; in fact, 'Voices of the Masses' went as far as inviting the public to read both organs since, it argued, they were the only progressive papers in the country.<sup>35</sup> However, their papers were deceptive in this regard since, under the surface, the hostility between their adherents continued to rage.

There is no doubt that EPRP showed a greater capacity in organisational activity than AESM and had the upper hand in this until at least the summer of 1975. In accordance with the mandate given to it at the time of its formation, the leadership of EPRP laid the foundation of its armed wing (The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Army) by sending sixteen of its members from Algeria to Eritrea for guerilla training by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front in September, 1973,<sup>36</sup> and by installing the same in the tortuous mountains of Assimba in Tigre province in February, 1975.<sup>37</sup> Later, other Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army bases were established in the North Western province of Gondar. The protracted people's war that was initially intended to fight Haile Selassie's government had now reached an advanced stage and was poised for a guerilla war against the Derg.

EPRP's organisational activities among the urban population were even more remarkable. The windfall that swelled its ranks came with the deployment in early 1975 of the sixty thousand or so teachers and students to the countryside under The National Development Campaign Programme of the Derg. EPRP activists established study clubs which they called 'Secret Youth Associations', and engaged the campaign participants in a day in, day out discussion on the study of Marxist-Leninist Literature, the achievement of the Ethiopian Revolution by the

Ethiopian Student Movement, the usurpation by the Derg of the Revolution, the failure of the Derg to implement effectively the land reform policy, and the obstruction of the implementation of the same by local officials which was again attributed to the Derg. The convinced participants of the secret youth associations, which by this time also existed in almost all the major towns of the country, were then channelled into one of the mass organisations created by EPRP (like the Ethiopian Workers' Associations, the Ethiopian Womens' Organisation and the Ethiopian Students' Revolutionary Organisation) depending on whether they were workers, women or students. All this came under the umbrella of yet another superior mass organisation, namely the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Youth League, suggesting that most of EPRP's activities were directed towards the youth. In addition to the politburo and the central committee, which have already been mentioned, the party itself was structured at the regional, sub-regional, zonal, basic and cell levels. The mass organisations were used by the party for raising funds, distributing pamphlets and generally agitating for the Party's line.<sup>38</sup> In this way, EPRP was able to mobilise to its side not only the campaign participants (who can be described as adherents of the Ethiopian University Students union of Addis Ababa) but also to infiltrate the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions and the Ethiopian Teachers' Association, and to have them adopt its line in their annual congresses. By August 1975, it felt so well integrated with the progressive social groups that it issued its programme officially, while maintaining at the same time that it was an underground party, and changed its name from the Ethiopian Communist Party or the Ethiopian people's Revolutionary Movement to the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party.

The leadership of AESM returned to Ethiopia en masse in early 1975 with two things in mind. First, its characterisation of the Derg's members as petit bourgeois

and, according to it, the Marxist conception of such a class as opportunist and as capable of taking sides with either the reactionary or progressive class enabled it to give what it called 'critical support' to the Derg. In other words, the leaders of AESM returned to work with the Derg until and on condition that it pursued progressive programmes. Having alienated the officials of the ancien regime through the deposition of the monarch and through its executions, the Derg had need at the time of alternative sources of support and had extended an invitation to intellectuals abroad to return to their homeland and help it construct the new Ethiopia. Accordingly, it interviewed all the returnees upon their arrival and assigned them to posts considered appropriate by both sides. This latter led to a collaboration between the leaders of AESM and a faction of the Derg led by Mengistu Haile-Mariam. Haile Fide (leader of AESM) and others from his organisation and the one time leader of the Ethiopian Students Union in North America (Senaye Likke) who had returned to Ethiopia several years earlier were by the summer of 1975 giving Mengistu and members of his faction their first lessons in Marxism-Leninism.

Secondly, AESM claimed to be a Marxist-Leninist political organisation and as such sought to integrate itself with the progressive social groups. In this regard, the most important opportunity offered itself with the creation of mass organisations particularly the Urban Dwellers Associations starting from the end of 1975. The Minister of Urban Development and Housing (who was responsible for running the elections of Urban Dwellers Association leaders) together with a number of others he was able to attract to work under him were part of the leadership of AESM. Further, the Derg was quite willing for AESM to have its members dominate the Urban Dwellers Association leaderships because of the alliance already forged between a faction of the Derg and AESM. If a particular Urban Dwellers Association was infiltrated by EPRP supporters, a re-election of the

leaders with a view to replacing them with pro-Derg pro-AESM individuals could be held at any time.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, there is asymmetry in the way the social organisations came down on the side of one or the other of the two political organisations: as EPRP infiltrated the Urban Dwellers Associations so did AESM infiltrate the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions, the Ethiopian Teachers Associations and the Students' Movement. The fact remains, nevertheless, that the Campaign Programme was to EPRP as the Urban Dwellers Association were to AESM.

With the withdrawal of the campaign participants to the cities, the activities of both organisations became even more focused on the urban social groups than was the case before. There is no doubt that, like EPRP, AESM also laid the foundations of its organisational structure within these groups. However, it is unlikely that it organised a set of mass organisations alternative to those of the Derg. It appears it was content to share with the Derg the mass organisations created by them jointly.

Though the differences between them had been simmering under the surface for a long time, EPRP and AESM did not make them public until the end of 1975. As of then, the papers of EPRP and AESM (Democracia and Voice of the Masses respectively) started attacking each other for the first time. A column in the official daily (Addis Zemen) called 'Revolutionary Forum' was devoted for several months in early 1976 to the purpose of airing their differences publicly. The positions of the two organisations could also be seen in their programmes. As already noted, EPRP issued its programme in August 1975; AESM's programme was not issued until April 1976. The name of the organisation (The All Ethiopian Socialist Movement) was actually adopted in the programme for the first time and, according to its preamble, the choice of the word 'movement' as opposed to a 'party' was made partly because the organisation did not feel it was

sufficiently integrated with the progressive classes and partly because it wanted to work closely with other political organisations of which by then there were several. More to the point was, perhaps, the implication of calling itself a party to the relations between AESM and the Derg: if the former had claimed to be a full-fledged party, it could have been accused of having intended to take power to the exclusion of all others including the Derg. The rest of this Section is devoted to describing the major differences between EPRP and AESM as reflected in the above mentioned documents.

### **The National Democratic Revolution (NDR)**

The one thing on which EPRP and AESM agreed was the characterisation of the then ongoing socio-economic and political change as what they variously called The Revolutionary Democratic Dictatorship of the Workers and Oppressed Peasants, The Democratic Revolution, The New Democratic Revolution, The National Democratic Revolution etc. According to them, this is a period during which feudalism, imperialism (especially that of the US) and capitalism, including bureaucratic as well as comprador capitalism, were liquidated by the working class in alliance with the peasants and the progressive petit bourgeoisie (progressive students, intellectuals, small merchants, soldiers and poor urban dwellers). Thus, the unfolding events since 1974 were seen as an uncompromising and violent struggle between the exploiting and exploited classes and their respective appendages. The struggle would come to an end when the exploiting classes were crushed, when the people's democratic republic was established, and when, in this way, the NDR gave way to the era of socialism.<sup>40</sup>

A February 1976 article written under the pen name of Petros Heraclitos, who could easily have been an adherent of either EPRP or AESM, made an attempt at tracing the historical development of the idea of NDR with citations from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao. It

explained that, during the English and French revolutions, the working class allied itself with the capitalists against feudalism, but that later, as it became obvious that the capitalists' interests diverged from those of the working class, the alliance gave way to antagonism. Marx and Engels were reported to have said that the role of the peasants in the 1848 'anti-capitalist' revolution in France was one of indifference or even downright pro-monarchy. However, the article went on, with the penetration of capital into the countryside in the second half of the nineteenth century, the poor farmers found themselves unable to compete with the rich ones, a fact which made the farmer politically conscious. Apparently, this development encouraged Marx and Engels to 'improve', as of 1870, their previous position on the poor peasants and treat them as a revolutionary class and urge communist parties to become active in the countryside as well. In other words, with the world domination of capital in the second half of the nineteenth century, the old contradiction between the aristocratic and middle classes gave way to an alliance between the imperialist, capitalist and feudal classes, forcing the workers and peasants to forge an alliance against them.

The article went on to explain that, to Lenin and Mao, their respective revolutions had to go through two stages; Democratic Revolution and Socialist Revolution. The former of the two revolutions is 'democratic' because it is led by the workers who would rule in the interest of the oppressed majority as contrasted with the previous 'democracies' which ruled in the interest of the privileged minority. Mao is reported to have said in 1949 that the workers must lead the NDR because that class, more than all other, is far-sighted, selfless and absolutely revolutionary.<sup>41</sup> For EPRP and AESM the validity of the characterisation of the then on-going socio-economic and political change in Ethiopia rested on citations from Marxist-Leninist literature and not on an

application of Marxism-Leninism to or on an analysis of the particular circumstances of Ethiopia (the size of the working class, the consciousness of the worker and peasant classes, the contribution of those classes to the changes that were taking place at the time and their ability to lead the revolution).

#### **The Leninist Vanguard Party; EPRP or AESM ?**

Both EPRP and AESM explained that, if the struggle of the broad masses (the workers, peasants and progressive petit bourgeoisie) against the exploiting classes was to succeed, they had to form an alliance under the leadership of an organised working class party. Each of these organisations saw itself as the working class vanguard party (actual or potential) which would lead the broad masses to victory against the exploiting classes. However, given the fact that both of them were avowed devotees of a single party system, the question of which one of them was to lead the broad masses to victory became a most fundamental and intractable problem on which they were unable to compromise. One solution open to them was the formation of a joint front as might have been expected. In their programmes, both EPRP and AESM expressed an interest in forming such a front, not with each other but with the other leftist groups that were springing up at the time. The continued EPRP - AESM competition for the role of the vanguard party arguably constituted the most important difference between them, partly because they both endorsed the use of force and violence to get their way (which had grave consequences for both later) and partly because most of their other differences, which were tactical in nature, proceeded from the more fundamental aim of becoming the party in power.

**The Derg a fascist or a more petit-bourgeois government?**

If EPRP and AESM each sought to seize power for itself, that was a matter for the future; in reality, power was then in the hands of the Derg and the Derg alone. The two organisations had to, and indeed did, take positions on that fact.

EPRP saw the steering committees that sprung up in the various rebellious corporate groups during the popular uprising of 1974 as equivalents of soviets in the USSR.<sup>42</sup> As noticed earlier, EPRP was condemning the Derg as 'fascist' from the time of its seizure of power mainly because it stifled the democratic rights of the steering committees which, according to EPRP, were progressive and hence on the side of the broad masses, and which would have been able to organise themselves and assume the position of leadership, had it not been for the Derg. It was never clear whether the characterisation of the Derg as 'fascist' was intended to mean that it was simply dictatorial (a common usage of the term in Ethiopia since the Mussolini invasion of the country in 1936) or whether it was intended to suggest that the Derg was pursuing the socio-economic and political policies of national Socialism. As EPRP's condemnation of the Derg hardened, it seemed to move closer and closer towards the second proposition.

In an October 1975 article, EPRP argued that the three primary enemies of the broad masses with whom progressives could not compromise, even temporarily, were imperialism, feudalism and fascism (the last being represented by the Derg). It explained that imperialism (the West) was arming both the aristocracy (EDU), which was trying to make a come-back, and the Derg, which was stifling the activities of the progressives and diverting the revolution from its correct path. The only difference between EDU and the Derg, it continued, was that each of them sought the power for themselves; otherwise there was a coincidence of interests between

the two and imperialism, all of which were collaborating to reverse the course of the Ethiopian Revolution. The Derg was thus portrayed as a fascist government equalled only by imperialism and feudalism in its enmity to the Revolution; the broad masses were called upon to destroy the three enemies with equal vigour.<sup>43</sup>

It was soon after this that AESM started making its differences with EPRP public. It admitted that previously it had itself also characterised the Derg as fascist, but that it had now rejected the characterisation because the Derg had recently showed its anti-feudal and anti-imperialist position through its reforms. AESM further explained that, being a petit bourgeois group, the Derg could have come down on the side of the broad masses or on the side of the reactionary forces; that there were still leftist and rightist wings within it; and that it was the leftist wing that made the reforms possible. AESM saw its role as being one of collaboration with the left-wing of the Derg and creating pressure on the remaining members with a view to forcing them to join the masses. <sup>44</sup>

**A Provisional People's Government versus a Provisional Military Government, or a Provisional People's Government versus the Politicisation, Organisation and Arming of the People.**

It is difficult to trace the origin of the demand for a 'Provisional People's Government' in the context of the change that was taking place in Ethiopia. At the time of the early 1974 popular uprising, there were underground papers which demanded the establishment of a Provisional People's Government, primarily because Haile Selassie's government was crumbling and because there was no obvious organised group to replace it. In the summer of the same year, however, the Derg emerged to fill that gap. Despite that, both EPRP and AESM took up the demand for the establishment of a Provisional People's Government in place of the Derg, and agitated for it

until they decided to make it an issue between themselves as of the end of 1975.

In an extensive article of November, 1975, EPRP not only advocated the establishment of a Provisional People's Government more strongly than ever before but also attempted to give it a theoretical basis with citations from Lenin. The central thrust of the article was the proposed establishment of a 'Provisional People's Congress' composed of elected representatives of social groups (such as workers, farmers, soldiers, women and the petit bourgeoisie) and the formation of a 'People's Provisional Government' through election by the Congress. The Provisional People's Government was defined as a joint front of the politically organised oppressed peoples, and was to be led by the workers in alliance with the peasants. Its tasks were declared to be taking the necessary measures against the anti-people and anti-revolution elements, granting unlimited democratic rights to the oppressed people, improving the economic and political conditions, resolving the nationalities question (especially the Eritrean question) and, in this manner, paving the way for the establishment of a 'People's Government'. The Derg, which was condemned for stifling the democratic rights of the masses, was declared to be unfit to act as transitional to a People's Government, and had, therefore, to be replaced by a Provisional People's Government; its coercive machinery, like the Courts and the Police force, had to be abolished; and its international agreements with the imperialist powers had to be repealed. It was further explained that Provisional People's Government had a historical precedent in Lenin's 1905 proposal for the establishment of a Provisional Revolutionary Government, which was no ordinary government but the dictatorship of the proletariat in alliance with the peasants.<sup>45</sup>

In a February, 1976, article, AESM claimed that it was the first to raise the demand for the establishment

of a Provisional People's Government in place of the Derg, but that it reflected it afterwards because it had realised that it would lead to a dictatorship by a section of the petit bourgeoisie. In a January, 1975, article, written in reaction to EPRP's proposition above, AESM had explained its reasons for the rejection of the Provisional People's Government. The thrust of the argument was that only the petit bourgeoisie were organised and hence able to take part in elections; that the establishment of a Provisional People's Government at that stage would lead to the formation of a petit bourgeois government; and that in order to establish a People's Government through elections in which only the oppressed masses would participate, feudalism and imperialism must first be violently destroyed through the insurrection of the people. To AESM 'People's' and 'Provisional' do not go together: a government established through elections in which the reactionary classes participate cannot be a People's Government; conversely, a government established through elections after the destruction of Feudalism and imperialism is a People's Government and hence need not be Provisional. AESM maintained that the establishment of a Provisional People's Government through election was the slogan not only of EPRP but also of EDU and CIA and of the Russian aristocracy on the eve of the Soviet Revolution, and that the correct slogan for Ethiopia at that time (1975/6) was the call for the 'Politicization, Organisation and Arming' of the masses. EPRP was castigated for equating its Provisional People's Government with Lenin's Provisional Revolutionary Government, the latter of which could only (according to AESM) be established after the overthrow of the reactionary classes through the insurrection of the masses, when truly democratic elections could be held. EPRP WAS further criticised for misquoting Lenin, for quoting a passage from the works of Stalin and attributing it to Lenin, in order to evade being checked out, and for distracting the people from

concentrating on their primary enemies of feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism. 46

Variations of this theme continue to be vigorously advocated and defended on the pages of Addis Zemen in the early part of 1976. EPRP identified the mass organisations with the steering committees of the corporate groups which were coordinating resistance to the ancien regime at the time of the 1974 popular uprising and equated them with the soviets in the Russian revolution. It demanded confidence in them rather than in the Derg to lead the revolution to victory.<sup>47</sup> On its part, AESM insisted that EPRP's call for an elected Provisional People's Government was a call for the depoliticisation, disorganisation and disarming of the masses; that it is EPRP's ploy to get to power through a shortcut; and that AESM would agitate for the violent abolition of feudalism and imperialism.<sup>48</sup>

It must be noted that both EPRP and AESM were aspiring Leninist parties and, as such, were not only theoreticians but also strategists. It is obvious that, if the Derg, which was then coming closer to AESM, was removed and replaced by a Provisional People's Government, EPRP might have hoped to absorb what it called the left wing of the Derg under its leadership and take over power for itself. The Derg adopted its 1975 nationalisation measures in the absence of any party and AESM might have hoped to fill the gap. In this sense, the issue under consideration was arguably 'a Provisional People's Government versus a Provisional Military Government, as EPRP formulated it', rather than 'a Provisional People's Government versus the Politicisation, Organisation and Arming of the Masses' as AESM would have it.

#### **Limited versus Unlimited Democratic Rights**

The programmes of EPRP and AESM both had extensive provisions on democratic rights.<sup>49</sup> However, those provisions talked about the status of democratic rights

only at some future date: the EPRP, programme dealt with rights under 'The National People's Congress', which it envisaged as coming before the formation of the People's Provisional Government; and that of AESM dealt with rights under 'The People's Democratic Republic' which it envisaged as the period that comes after the consummation of the National Democratic Revolution. Since both organisations had, therefore, made their positions on the status of future rights clear, it can perhaps be assumed that the debate on Limited versus Unlimited democratic Rights that raged on the pages of Addis Zemen in early 1976 were intended to relate to rights under the Derg.

To take an example of the status of future rights for a moment, EPRP's programme provided that the National People's Congress would safeguard the freedom of activity of all political parties, organisations and individuals, on condition that they were anti-feudal, anti-imperialist, and anti-bureaucratic-capitalist;<sup>50</sup> AESM's programmes provided that the 'Unrestricted Rights' of speech, press, assembly, organisation, demonstration and strike of the people would be guaranteed under the People's Democratic Republic.<sup>51</sup> It is obvious from these provisions that EPRP sought to limit democratic rights to the broad masses after the removal of the Derg and during the period of National Democratic Revolution, and AESM sought to extend them to all the people, albeit after the declaration of Socialism when all reactionary classes would have presumably been ousted from power. Despite this projection of democratic rights, however, the arguments in the Addis Zemen made out that EPRP (advocates of unlimited rights) sought to extend democratic rights to the reactionary classes, and AESM (advocates of limited rights) sought to limit them to the broad masses. As suggested earlier, the debate relates to the time of the Derg.

Articles written in support of AESM's position argued that in no class society are rights the same for all classes; that proletarian dictatorship is brought

about not through the granting of rights to the reactionary classes but through violent and bloody struggle with them; and that if democratic rights are not limited to the masses, the opportunists, swindlers and reactionaries would confuse the people and reinstate the old order. <sup>52</sup> On its part, EPRP argued that the claim that reactionaries might use rights given to them to their own advantage was indeed a problem but at the same time showed lack of confidence in the broad masses who had resisted the ancien regime heroically and thereby showed the degree of their consciousness; that, rights or no rights, the reactionaries were shedding blood all over the country; that it was not laws but the people who could curtail the freedom of action of the reactionaries; and that if rights were granted for a given class but not for another, there would be a problem concerning who was to act as the arbiter on the question of who was and was not reactionary.<sup>53</sup>

Here, EPRP seemed to be caught unprepared; it seemed to want to give a modicum of rights to the reactionary classes. However, given the provision cited from its programme above and given its other records (its agitation for the violent ousting of landlords from their land, its condemnation of EDU, etc) it is impossible to assume that it was any more reconciliatory toward the reactionary class than AESM. At any rate, the question of limited versus unlimited rights was perhaps the most dangerous of the issues raised by the two organisations because of its implication that EPRP itself could be characterised as a 'swindler, opportunist and reactionary' organisation and, at best, be denied the democratic right to organise and agitate among the people or, at worst, be eliminated by the Derg, as happened later.

## **Privatisation versus Nationalisation of Rural Land**

EPRP's programme went along with most of the ideas, contained in the Derg's measure of nationalisation of rural land of March 1987. Thus, the programme announced that EPRP would advocate the redistribution of land to peasants, the settlement of nomadic people for agricultural purposes, the gradual and voluntary collectivisation of holdings and promotion of state farms. One important departure from the Derg's policy was that EPRP would base its redistribution of land not on use-right but on private ownership of holdings.<sup>54</sup> As noted earlier, the only Derg measure that the EPRP had accepted wholeheartedly was the nationalisation of rural land; the reasons for its deviation from that position later are not altogether clear. There is no doubt, however, that it constituted a change of mind which brought it closer to the position of EDU than AESM.

On the other hand, AESM's programme endorsed the Derg's agrarian strategy in its entirety, and declared that its only concern was the correct implementation of that policy.<sup>55</sup> Addis Zemen articles written in support of AESM's position on the question rejected EPRP's endorsement of private ownership of redistributed holdings as going against Marxism.<sup>56</sup>

## **People's versus Bureaucratic Control of the Economy**

By and large, both EPRP and AESM went along with the Derg's nationalisation of urban land and extra houses, industrial and commercial enterprises and financial institution particularly those owned by aliens.<sup>57</sup> The difference between the two groups related to the appropriate management of the nationalised means of production and other undertakings; EPRP seemed to want to pursue a more decentralised form of management than did AESM. EPRP's paper (Democracia) had throughout been

condemning the Derg's nationalisation measures because, it claimed, they transferred the means of production from private to bureaucratic control instead of transferring them from private to peoples control. EPRP's programme re-iterated the same position: for instance, it guaranteed that rural land would come under 'the full control of the broad peasant masses in practice',<sup>58</sup> that industry and finance would not come under the monopolist control of the bureaucracy; that their 'economy and finance' would be brought under the people's control;<sup>59</sup> and that 'all banks, insurance companies, corporations, power stations, big transport companies, communications, basic industries, mines,....' of the state would be brought under 'the direct control of the people in practice'.<sup>60</sup> Further, EPRP's overall management strategy was declared to be 'to plan for a balanced and self-reliant economy based on the correct relationship between agriculture and industry and between light and heavy industries'.<sup>61</sup>

AESM made no such reference to people's control of the nationalised micro-economic units in its papers or programme. On the contrary, it welcomed the nationalisation of rural land by the Derg;<sup>62</sup> the retention as public property of the nationalised industrial, distributing and commercial companies;<sup>63</sup> and the placing of all foreign trade under the 'control of the state'.<sup>64</sup> AESM's programme further provided that its policy concerning the management of the economy was to be based on 'a strong and centrally planned ... national economy...'<sup>65</sup>

EPRP's notion of the people's control of the micro-economic units was never explained but it can perhaps be interpreted to mean peasant associations and workers' control of the units rather than control by the government bureaucracy. This, coupled with the idea of the national plan (the purpose of which was not to bring the national economy under central control but to iron out imbalance between the agricultural and industrial

sectors and between light and heavy industries), gives the impression that EPRP was in favour of a decentralised, democratic economy order. Conversely, AESM's espousal of a 'strong centrally planned national economy' and its emphasis on the industrial sector (as reflected by the declaration in its programme that 'with agriculture as the foundation of the economy, all possible efforts are to be made to establish and expand heavy and light modern industries that will play a leading role in the development of the economy throughout the country.')66 suggest that its strategy was more urban-based and centralisation-orientated than that of EPEP's.

#### CONCLUSION

Despite the publicity given to the debates, it is doubtful whether the population, save those within it who were already versed in Marxist literature, was any the wiser for it. In the first place, Marxist terminology was new to the official language (Amharic) in which the debates were conducted; as a result, a lot of new usage of old terms and the coining of new phrases had to be made. A more confusing problem was the multiplicity of the topics raised and discussed but not sufficiently distinguished one from the other. An enumeration of the types of governments discussed in the debates makes the point clear: the Ancien Regime, the Derg, the Provisional People's Congress, the Provisional People's Government, the People's Revolutionary Government, the People's Republic, the Party etc. To make matters worse, each of these in turn had a multitude of names by which they were called. The bulk of the debate revolved around the question of what a Leninist party's position ought to be towards these different stages of government in the process of attaining a socialist political order.

As argued earlier, most of the issues raised by the two organisations were concerned with strategies of how to get to power and reflect the time when they were

debated (end of 1975 and 1976). As such, the positions adopted cannot explain the essence of the differences between the EPRP and AESM since their existence as different organisations precedes the controversies under consideration. Perhaps the real importance of the public debate lay in widening the already existing gap between the two organisations; in arming their adherents, the members of the Derg, and the society at large with slogans and polemics, with which they fought verbal wars; and in defining the cleavages along which the civil war was fought out later.

On the theoretical plane, it could be argued that EPRP espoused Maoism and AESM Stalinism. The former talked about the New Democratic Revolution, raising a people's army and encircling the cities into submission from a rural base, and about people's control of the nationalised means of production, which were more similar to the locally managed communes of China than to the centrally run collectives and enterprises of the USSR. As of the middle of 1975, however, EPRP seemed to revise its earlier positions and move towards moderation and an urban based revolutionary strategy. Thus, it advocated the need to develop capitalist relations of production before a successful socialist revolution could be carried out;<sup>67</sup> private ownership of redistributed rural land; the formation of a provisional government made up of the mass organisations (which were mainly urban-based) to lead the revolution to victory; in addition to which it abandoned its idea of a rural people's army in favour of an urban armed struggle against AESM and the Derg as of the Autumn of 1976. Conversely, AESM was, during the same period, moving away from the more reconciliatory stance of inviting the public to read the progressive paper of EPRP, beside its own, to initiating a public controversy with it. Thus, the leaders of AESM returned to Ethiopia in early 1975 to ride the tide of change - an event which they apparently likened to Lenin's return to revolutionary Russia - and subsequently identified

themselves with the highly centralised government of the Derg; advocated a strong centrally planned national economy and the mobilisation of the national economy by giving a leading role to the industrial sector. These positions coupled with the fact that it had no rural revolutionary strategy could, arguably, identify AESM with Stalin rather than with Mao.

Nevertheless, it is doubtful if these theoretical questions were at bottom of the differences between the two organisations. First, most of those differences in outlook developed after the emergence of the two as different organisations. Second, most of those differences did not figure substantially in the controversy under consideration. Finally, the fact that both of them were changing their positions on some of the questions distorted whatever clarity there might have been previously.

It is suggested that the real differences between EPRP and AESM remain deeply embedded in the annals of the Ethiopian Student Movement of the early 1970's: in the differences of going abroad at different times, in personal rivalries, and in group competition for leadership of student bodies. The conflict that flared up in student circles then was later fed with fiery polemics and slogans to justify and sustain the notion that the differences between the two organisations were no mere splitting of hairs but rooted in irreconcilably antagonistic ideological foundations. For Ethiopians, as perhaps for most peoples of the world, the art of politics is not the art of compromise but of victory - a cultural bias which the traditional factional infighting common to Marxist groups did very little to mitigate.

**(B) THE DERG'S SHIFT FROM "AFRICAN SOCIALISM" TO "SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM".**

With the return from abroad of the radical left and especially of the adherents of EPRP and AESM as of the

summer of 1974, Ethiopia started acquiring the first generation of organised progressive revolutionaries. Within a year, they dominated the political scene of the country by entrenching themselves in the already politicised corporate groups and movements and were in a position to challenge the monopoly of power of the Derg. The adoption by the Derg of the ideology of the civilian left not only seemed to offer the hope of closing the gap between it and the leftist political organisations but also came nearest to exonerating the Derg's atrocities against the high civilian and military dignitaries of the old order as well as providing a theoretical basis for its measures of nationalisation. The adoption of liberal politics such as was represented by the Ethiopian Democratic Union meant, in part at least, having to account for measures that were not appropriate or legal. It was for considerations like these and its nationalist - populist sentiments (and not because of a pre-existing commitment) that the Derg set in motion as of September 1975 the process of adopting Marxism-Leninism as an appropriate ideology for Ethiopia.

On the occasion of the inauguration of Revolution Square in Addis Ababa on September 11, 1975, the chairman of the Derg (Brigadier General Teferi Bante) gave a strong indication that the process of adopting a new ideology by the government was underway. He said that the Derg's programme of action for the following year of the Ethiopian calendar (September 1975 -August 1976) would include among others, a new labour legislation to help workers become organised, politicised and more productive; political education for the peasants; the establishment of a Mass Political Education and co-ordination office under a People's Organising Political Committee (the latter of which had apparently already been created by the Derg); and the 'leadership of the masses by revolutionary democracy.'<sup>68</sup> From then to April 1976, the rhetoric of the Derg began to change: mostly it continued to talk of 'Ethiopia First' and of

'Ethiopian Socialism'; at times, however, it started using the terms and phrases of the leftist groups. A communique of the Derg issued towards the end of September, 1975, declared that it would hand power over to the workers, peasants and the true progressives after it had destroyed the reactionary classes.<sup>69</sup> Also, in his December, 1975, address to a seminar on the implementation of a new labour legislation, the first vice president (Major Mengistu ) emphasised that a revolutionary workers' organisation is one which is anti-feudal, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist.<sup>70</sup> Further, on the occasion of the Adwa victory day anniversary (Yekatit 23, 1976), the first chairman of the Derg talked of anti-feudal, anti-capitalist and anti-colonial struggle<sup>71</sup> but concluded his speech on the occasion of another victory day a month later by saying: 'May the Lord of Peace, the all powerful God allow us to have peace and enable us to celebrate the occasion again next year.'<sup>72</sup>

The same trend was reflected in the legislation of the Derg at the time. The preambles to those legislations started dropping 'Ethiopian Socialism' in favour of just 'Socialism' and the new labour legislation and the Peasant Association Consolidation Proclamation of December 1975 gave unions and peasant associations extensive political roles in their relations with their members. Thus, unions had to function in line with socialist principles and cooperate in the formulation of political directives;<sup>73</sup> and Peasant Associations were directed to enable the peasantry to participate in the struggle against feudalism and imperialism by building its consciousness in line with socialism, and were directed to establish, among other things, cooperative societies and peasant defence squads.<sup>74</sup> Similarly service cooperative societies were obliged 'to give education in socialist philosophy and cooperative work in order to enhance the political consciousness of the peasantry.'<sup>75</sup> and the agricultural producers cooperatives 'to struggle

for the gradual abolition of exploitation from the rural areas and to refrain from any kind of exploitation', and 'to engage in continuous political involvement in order to enhance the political consciousness of the members.'<sup>76</sup> Similar provisions existed for the politicisation and the arming of the urban dwellers associations as well. The idea of defence squads, which was envisaged for both Peasant Associations and Urban Dwellers Associations, was none other than what AESM and EPRP had been advocating as the arming of the masses in order to defend the revolution against its enemies. Thus, while EPRP and AESM were agitating for the politicisation, organisation and arming of the masses, the Derg was implementing the same, not under the control of these organisations but that of its own.

The People's Organising Political Committee, which the first chairman mentioned on September 10th, 1975, as already having come into existence appears to have been made up of seven Derg members as well as Lij Michael Imiru (Political adviser to the chairman of the Derg) and four ministers. The members of the Derg on the committee were Major Mengistu Haile-Mariam (Chairman), Major Sisay Habte, Captain Moges Walde-Michael, Captain Alemayehu Haile, Lieutenant Colonel Asrat Desta, Major Birihanu Baye, and Major Debela Dinsa.<sup>77</sup> Obviously, this committee was launched for the purpose of articulating the ideology required to involve the masses in what the chairman of the Derg called: 'revolutionary democracy.' As it happened, the Committee seems to have chosen to delegate this mandate to another committee made up of individuals better versed in the subject matter while retaining for itself the power of supervision. As already noted, the impending establishment of such a committee (The mass Political Education and Coordination Committee) was announced by the chairman of the Derg on September 10th, 1975. Soon after, the members of that committee were interviewed and recruited by the People's Organising Political Committee and the committee was in

full swing as of December , 1975. Its members were Haile Fida (Chairman), Senaye Likke (vice-Chairman), Negede Gobeze, Tesfaye Shewaye, Fikre Merid, Wond-Wosen Hailu, Melese Ayalew, Mesfin Kasu, Alemu Abebe, Bezabh Maru, Nigist Adane, Andargachew Asegid, Yonas Admasu, Ishetu Chole and Asefa Medhane. With the exception of several of these like Senaye Likke (Leader of Worker's League) Jonas Admasu (Member of EPRP who probably joined the committee without declaring his allegiance to that organisation), Tesfaye Shewaye, Melese Ayalew, Ishetu Chole and Asefa Medhane (Independent marxist), the others were members of AESM.

By April 20, 1976, the Mass Political Education and Coordinating Committee had completed drafting what came to be known as 'The National Democratic Revolutionary Programme of Ethiopia' (NDRPE) and the People's Organising Political Committee and the Derg had approved the same. <sup>78</sup> In a radio and television address to the nation on the same day, Major Mengistu explained the outlines of the Programme in a fair amount of detail. He said that feudalism had emerged in Ethiopia towards the end of the Axumite Empire (the end of the millenium AD) and had spread first to northern Ethiopia and then been imposed by Emperor Minilick on the pre-existing feudal system of Southern Ethiopia towards the end of the nineteenth century. Imperialism had come to Ethiopia, he continued, with the scramble for Africa in the late nineteenth century; although political independence had not been lost by the country as a result, imperialism had penetrated Ethiopia and started exploiting the people. Then, feudalism and imperialism had created the instrument of exploitation (bureaucratic capitalism) which coordinated them in their drive to exploit the people. Bureaucratic capitalism was described as devoid of nationalism and any intention of liberating the country; rather, it was interested in using its power to amass wealth illegally. These three (imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism), as well as

comprador bourgeoisie, he explained, constituted the enemies of the Ethiopian people.

Pitted against these were, he explained, the workers, farmers, the anti-feudal, anti-imperialist petit bourgeoisie, and similar classes, who had been resisting exploitation over the years and who, since February, 1974, had been scoring a number of victories against the reactionaries. The exploited classes, he continued, constituted *the bulk of the* population, and had to rise and fight for the NDRPE. He explained further that the programme was called 'National' because it liberated the people from neo-colonialism and imperialism; and it was called 'Democratic' because it abolished feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism, made the masses owners of the means of production, gave them democratic rights and resolved the national and workers' questions democratically. The difference between a bourgeois and a democratic revolution was that the former was led by the bourgeoisie and abolished feudalism, whereas the latter was led by the workers and abolished feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism.

Mengistu concluded his speech by making an impassioned appeal to progressives. He said that the neighbouring states were not supportive of revolution or of a strong socialist Ethiopia; that Ethiopia was the land of many oppressed people and not of many revolutionaries; that time is life; and that, therefore, 'it is the duty of revolutionaries to form a joint front quickly and fight feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism'.<sup>79</sup>

The NDRPE was published in the daily papers the next day (April 21, 1976).<sup>80</sup> The Programme was envisaged to govern the period during which the progressive forces and the broad masses would be politicised, armed and organised in order to eliminate the reactionary classes, the workers' party formed, and the people's democratic republic established.

The Programme declared that the Government would give its urgent attention to the following matters. The broad masses were to be engaged in 'a continuous revolutionary process' under which they would be involved in mass consciousness, in the setting up of mass organisations and in being armed in order to eliminate the class enemies of the people. In this way the masses were to struggle for the establishment of a people's revolutionary front and the Government would back them in the endeavour.<sup>81</sup>

Further, the Government acknowledged that, in order for the masses to become politically conscious, organised and armed, only the anti-feudal, anti-imperialist and anti-bureaucratic-capitalist forces should be allowed to exercise democratic rights, including freedom of speech, press, assembly, holding peaceful demonstrations, and of forming organisations.<sup>82</sup> Also, the Government recognised that the programme would be assured of victory when the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist parties and organisations formed a united revolutionary front; that the struggle of democratic parties under the umbrella of the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist objective would strengthen the common revolutionary mass struggle; and that the victories of the united revolutionary front would be consolidated when the vanguard of the revolution (the working class party) was established. Thus the Government committed itself to extending 'unceasing support' to revolutionary parties whose struggle would be aimed at the establishment of a working class party, the 'necessary moral and material support to democratic parties willing to work under the joint front', and 'special assistance' to the working class party.<sup>83</sup>

Something not declared to require the urgent attention of the Government and hence, perhaps, a matter of long term interest, was the establishment of a non-provisional government. It was stated that after the masses were organised and the revolutionary joint front formed, the people would elect the members of a people's

revolutionary assembly through free and secret ballot. The candidates were to be representatives of parties and organisations that took part in the struggle to organise the masses and to form the joint front. The people's revolutionary assembly was declared to constitute 'the highest political office in the government.' Then, in line with a constitution to be approved by the representatives of the people (perhaps meaning a constitution to be drawn and approved by the people's revolutionary assembly), the people's democratic republic would be established under the leadership of the working class party.<sup>84</sup>

As noted earlier, AESM was working in close collaboration with the Derg; in fact it is often said that the leader of AESM (Haile Fida) personally drafted the NDRPE. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that AESM's positions as described in the previous section were incorporated wholesale into the NDRPE. The emphasis on politicisation, organisation and arming of the masses; the granting of democratic rights exclusively to the masses and to progressives; the holding of democratic elections only after the elimination of the reactionary classes; and the establishment, in this way, of the people's democratic republic were all positions emphatically claimed by AESM as its own. Perhaps, the most important difference in this regard between EPRP and AESM was concerning the duration of the Derg; EPRP sought to abolish it right away in favour of what it called 'The Provisional People's Government' while AESM showed its willingness for the Derg to continue to rule by evading the subject, by according the Derg what it called 'critical support' or by expressing a desire to collaborate with what was to it, 'the left-wing of the Derg.' Here, too, AESM's position was upheld by the NDRPE, since the latter envisaged the continuation of the Derg until the establishment of the people's democratic republic.

The Derg's intention to preside over the implementation of the NDRPE and all that it entailed is seen more clearly in the legalisation of the committees which were primarily responsible for the drafting and approval of the programme. On April 21, 1976, a proclamation was decreed inaugurating the establishment of a new agency called 'The Peoples Organising Provisional Office', later re-christened 'The Provisional Office for Mass Organisational Affairs' (POMOA). This agency was a fully fledged government department, which was to receive a budgetary allocation from the Treasury;<sup>85</sup> manage affairs coming within its jurisdiction under the direction of a body called 'The Supreme Organising Committee' to be established by the head of state (perhaps the Derg);<sup>86</sup> and submit quarterly reports on its activities to that committee.<sup>87</sup>

The Supreme Organising Committee was most probably what was referred to earlier as the People's Organising Political Committee chaired by Mengistu.

POMOA's leading organ was its commission of 15 members who were directed to organise themselves into four permanent sub-committees in the areas of philosophy dissemination and information, political education, current affairs, and organisation affairs.<sup>88</sup> The commission is none other than The Mass Political Education and Coordination Office discussed earlier. Also, POMOA was to have branch offices at the provincial, awraja and district levels, for which the Commission was to review periodic reports on their activities<sup>89</sup> and to which it had to assign cadres.<sup>90</sup> In addition, the Commission was entrusted with the task of heading the new Yekatit 1966 political school, established for training cadres.<sup>91</sup>

Further mandates of POMOA included: enforcing and interpreting the scope of a democratic rights proclamation (a proclamation which was promised but never decreed); preparing articles and directories on the philosophy of socialism in the languages of various

nationalities and disseminating the same; and preparing directories and plans for training of cadres at home and abroad<sup>92</sup>. The developments which were not specifically envisaged by the legislation but which followed in the wake of POMOA's establishment were the launching of its paper (called Revolutionary Ethiopia') used for the dissemination of Marxism-Leninism, and a weekly discussion meeting lasting two hours in all governmental and non-governmental organisations of the country.

As is obvious from the names of the permanent sub-committee and the discussions above, the main takes of politicising the masses along Marxist-Leninist lines, for which AESM had been agitating so much, was entrusted to POMOA (which was dominated by AESM but controlled by the Derg). The other question for which it had been agitating as much (the organising of the masses into mass organisations) had, however, to be shared by POMOA with government agencies created partly for the purpose, like the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing and Ministry of Agriculture. The third focus of AESM's agitations (the arming of the masses) was, nevertheless, retained by the Derg completely. The fact that the law on democratic rights was promised but never enacted not only hindered the emergence of new political organisations but also left the existing ones in limbo. It must be noted that what was stated in the POMOA proclamation was much more concrete than what was stated in the NDRPE, since the former is a legal document and the latter a declaration of policy.

Be that as it may, the NDRPE constituted a massive ideological shift on the part of the Derg, not for the first time either. 'Ethiopia First' of July 1974 could be described as the programme of a coup d'etat; 'Ethiopian Socialism' of December 1974 as the programme of African socialism; and 'the NDRPE' of April 1976 as the programme of scientific socialism. The first of these programmes did not have a policy on the question of party formation but merely criticised the officials of

the old order and talked about the 'general good' as something to be pursued in the future. 'Ethiopian Socialism' was also inward looking: "the political philosophy should spring from the culture and the soil of Ethiopia and should, moreover, emanate from the aspiration of the broad masses and not be imported from abroad like some decorative article of commerce .... The political philosophy which emanates from our great religions which teach the equality of man, from our tradition of living and sharing together, as well as from our History so replete with national sacrifice, is Hibretebawinet" (Ethiopian socialism).

Further, it saw the Ethiopian society as a mere extension of the family: not only did it assert that contradictions between the rulers and the ruled had emerged only in the previous 30 years, but it also argued that the appropriate party for Ethiopia was 'A single mass party embracing the whole of society, engaging the people in a free exchange of ideas and acting as a check against government ineptitude...' The NDRPE, on the other hand, saw the Ethiopian society as divided into classes, and the unfolding events since 1974 as part of a workers' world-wide movement towards socialism. It further provided for the establishment of more than one party, but such parties had to be anti-feudal, anti-imperialist, and anti-bureaucratic-capitalist, and also had to aim at establishing a single workers' party.

#### CONCLUSION

The import of this chapter is that because of the preponderance of leftist movements in the wake of the 1974 uprising, the Derg was persuaded to adopt, not only increasingly radical socio-economic reforms as discussed in the previous chapter, but also Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology of Ethiopia. It would appear that the Derg need not have involved the radical left in its decision making processes. However, starting from well before 1974, the Students' Movement had established the orthodoxy that to be Marxist was to be progressive.

Consequently, upon its seizure of power, the Derg invited leftist individuals at home and abroad to come and work with it and, when they did, assigned them to work in its headquarters as well as in key government positions. This gave factions of the civilian left ample opportunity to influence members of the Derg and, as will be noted in the following chapter, to involve them in the factional feuds of the civilian left.

Some have dismissed ideology as unimportant on the ground that Marxism-Leninism is a smoke screen for justifying the seizure and exercise of power by the military. This may well be the intention of the Derg in adopting NDRPE. However, in the first place, the adoption of an ideology by the Derg has provided it with a kind of legitimacy to rule or as much claim to power as the civilian left. Secondly, Marxism-Leninism has been important in rallying certain sections of the partisans of the ideology and the masses of the people behind the government. Thirdly, the fact that the ideology was crucial in influencing the direction of the revolution makes the adoption of NDRPE important. Marxism-Leninism has in practice concrete programmes: nationalization of the means of production, central planning of the economy, an anti-west pro-east foreign policy and the like. As will be noted in the following chapters, it was this direction that Ethiopia followed, more determinedly than ever, after the adoption of the NDRPE and after Mengistu's ascent to absolutest powers.

#### FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. Markakis, J. and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia, Spokesman Press, London, 1978, p.52.
2. Le Monde, 6-7 June 1976, cited in Advocate "Le Monde Interviews EDU's Chairman" (EDU Advocate Vol. I, No. 2, August 1976).
3. "Who is Behind EDU?" (Aims and Objectives of EDU, is the programme of the organisation; it is no dated, formatted in the form of articles, nor has it got page numbers.)
4. "Who is Behind EDU" Programme of EDU, see Note 3 above.
5. "How does EDU Propose to Remove the Derg?", Programme of EDU, see Note 3 above.
6. "What are EDU's Plans after it Removes the Derg?", Programme of EDU, see Note 3 above.
7. "What does EDU Stand For?", Programme of EDU see Note 3 above.
8. "EDU's Commitment to Land Reform", Programme of EDU, see Note 3 above.
9. "Economic Programme", Programme of EDU, see Note 3 above.
10. "What is EDU?", Programme of EDU, see Note 3 above.
11. "A Message from EDU", Advocate, Vol.I, No. 1, December, 1975.
12. "What is EDU?", Programme of EDU, see Note 3. above.
13. "What does EDU Stand For?", Programme of EDU, see Note 3 above.
14. "A Message from EDU", Advocate, Vol. I, No. 1, December 1975.
15. "EDU's Commitment to Land Reform", Programme of EDU, see Note 3. Programme of EDU, see Note 3.
16. "How does EDU Propose to Remove the Derg?", Programme of EDU, see Note 3.
17. "Derg Upsets Ethiopia's Neighbours", Advocate, Vol. I, No. 2, August. 1976.
18. "Confusion and Democracy", Voice with Afar People, Advocate, Vol.I, No. 2, August, 1976.

19. "How does EDU Propose to Remove the Derg?", Programme of EDU, see Note 3.
20. "Opposition and Martial Law", Africa, Nov. 1975, cited in Advocate, Vol. I, No. 1, December 1975.
21. "EDU Helps Defeat Peasant March", Advocate, Vol. I, No. 3, September 1976.
22. See, for example, "EDU Forces Engage in Defeating Derg Troops in Many Districts", Advocate, Vol. I, No. 4, October-November 1976.
23. "A.E.S.M. is Dismissed From Membership", Voice of Unity, April 1978. (Voice of Unity is the paper of the joint Front of Ethiopian Marxist Leninist Organisations, launched August 1977.)
24. Markakis, J. and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia, Spokesman Press, London 1978
25. "Where Have We Got To?", Voice of the Masses, No. 37, February 3, 1976.
26. See Note 1. above at page 15.
27. The Preamble of the December 1976, Ethiopian Marxist Leninist Revolutionary Organisation's Programme.
28. Doctor Senaye Likke. The Ethiopian Revolution, Problems and Prospects, no date.
29. Balsuik, Raudi: Ronning, "The Ethiopian Student Movement in the 1960's: Challenges and Responses", Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Ethiopian Studies Lund, 1982, pp. 491-509.
30. Legese Lema "The Ethiopian Student Movement (1960-1974), a challenge to the Monarchy and Imperialism", North-East African Studies, Vol. I, No. 2, 1979-80).
31. The author was present on the occasion of the main campus rally in December 1969.
32. ~~32.~~ INTERVIEW WITH MEMBERS OF ESUNA WHO ATTENDED THE MEETING
32. Melaku Tegegn, "EPRP: Historical Background and a Critical Assessment of its Experiences", 2nd Annual Conference on the Horn of Africa, New School and Social Research, New York, May 29-30, 1987.
34. The author attended the proceedings of the 14th Annual Ethiopian Student Union of Europe Congress in West Berlin, August 1974.
35. "A Notice to Readers", Voice of the Masses, No. 7, October 1, 1974.

36. The History Committee, "The Beginning and Development of the Ethiopian Revolution." Unpublished, October 1976, Chapter 6, p. 6.
37. Melaku Tegegn, see Note 4 above.
38. "Red Terror on the Fortress of the White Terror", Revolutionary Ethiopia, Second year, No. 42, February 22, 1978. (Revolutionary Ethiopia is the paper of P.O.M.O.A., which was launched in May 1976).
39. See for example, "Fourteen Leaders of Kebel 16 in the Tekle-Haymanot District are Replaced" Addis Zemen, No. 442, June 23, 1976.
40. For a concise account of the EPRP and AESM perceptions of NDR, see their programmes; see especially the preamble and Article I of the August 1975, EPRP programme; and Parts I and III A (I) of the April 1976, AESM programme.
41. Heraclitus, Marcus, "The Content and Aims of the New Democratic Revolution" Addis Zemen No. 947, March 1st, 1976.
42. Kekle Tasew, "A People's Provisional Government is the Demand of the Broad Masses", Addis Zemen No. 978, March 11, 1976.
43. "Feudal Lords, Imperialists and Fascists are a Trinity" Democracia, Vol. II, No. 23, November 18, 1975.
44. "Where Have We Got To?", Voice of the Masses, No. 37, February 3, 1976.
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46. "For a People's Provisional Government or for a Conscious Organised and Armed People's Struggle", Voice of the Masses, No. 35, 1975.
47. See, for example Kelkille Taseu, "A People's Provisional Government is the Demand of the Broad Masses" Addis Zemen, No. 978, April 9, 1976; No. 979, April 10, 1976; and No. 980, April 11, 1976.
48. See, for example, Suleman Musa, "Provisional People's Government in the Demand of the Revisionists", Addis Zemen, No. 996, April 30, 1976.
49. Article II of the August 1975 EPRP programme; and Part III (c) of the 1976 AESM programme.
50. Article II (2) of the August 1975 EPRP programme.

51. Part III (c) (1) of the April 1976 AESM programme.
52. See for example: Yemane Cherinet, "Democracy Without Limitation", Addis Zemen, No. 937, February 20, 1976.
53. For EPRP's position on democratic rights, the most extensive argument is: Hamacho Mohogano, "Democratic Rights to Whom Democratic Rights Why?", Addis Zemen, No. 937, February 18, 1976.
54. Article III (1) (a), (c), and of the August 1975 EPRP programme.
55. Part iv) (d) of the April 1976, AESM programme.
56. See for example: "Revolutions Do No Settle Before They Have Been Turbulent", Addis Zemen, No. 985, April 17, 1976.
57. Article III (b) (3) (4) of the August 1975 EPRP programme; and, part iv (5) of the April 1976 AESM programme.
58. Article II (a) of August 1975 EPRP programme.
59. Article III (3) (a) of the August 1975 EPRP programme.
60. Article III (3) (b) of the August 1975 EPRP programme.
61. Ibid.
62. Part IV (4) of the April 1976 AESM programme.
63. Part IV (5) of the April 1976 AESM programme.
64. Part IV (6) of the April 1976 AESM programme.
65. Part IV (1) of the April 1976 AESM programme.
66. Part IV (8) of the April 1976 AESM programme.
67. See Democracia at Note 17 above.
68. "The Speech of the First Chairman", Addis Zemen, No. 807, September 12, 1975.
69. "Our Revolution Will Not Be Reversed By Strikes", Addis Zemen, No. 822, October 1, 1975.
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72. "The Chairman's speech on the occasion of the 33rd Victory day", Addis Zemen, No. 976, April 6, 1976.
73. Article 52 (3) (b) (g) of Proclamation 64 1975.
74. Article 5 (3) and (4) of Proclamation 71 1975.
75. Article 7 (6) of Proclamation 71 1975.
76. Article 8 (8) and (9) of Proclamation 71 1975.
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78. Ibid.
79. "The Speech of Mengistu Haile Mariam Explaining the National Democratic Revolution Programme of Ethiopia", Addis Zemen, No. 988, April 21, 1976.
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81. Section iii (3) of the NDRPE.
82. Section iii (1) of the NDRPE.
83. Section iii (2) of the NDRPE.
84. Section iv of the NDRPE.
85. Article 9 of Proclamation 91, 1976.
86. Articles 2 (1) and (3) of Proclamation 91, 1976.
87. Articles 12 of Proclamation 91, 1976.
88. Article 4 of Proclamation 91, 1976.
89. Article 12 (2) of Proclamation 91, 1976.
90. Article 7 of Proclamation 91, 1976.
91. Article 8 (6) of Proclamation 91, 1976.
92. Article 8 (1), (2), (4), (8), of Proclamation 1, 1976.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **Mengistu Haile-Mariam's Emergence as the Absolute Head of State**

The previous chapters have shown how the Derg emerged as a collective body of absolute government powers in 1974; how that power fell into the hands of an officers' junta by the beginning of 1975; and how that junta adopted radical socio-economic and ideological policies in 1975 and 1976. The adoption of NDRPE (Scientific Socialism) was the last important collective act of the junta. The adoption of this ideology was perhaps important in giving the changes some sense of direction; at the same time, however, it appears to have brought to the forefront the question of power, which has a greater claim on the minds of those engaged in the business of politics than does ideology. The present chapter is concerned mainly with the power-struggle within the officer's junta and with the process of Mengistu Haile-Mariam's emergence from that as the absolute head of state.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Section A deals with the configuration of coalitions among the political groups in the country and with how, as part of the leader of one of these coalitions, Mengistu rallied support around himself, thus posing a challenge to the pre-existing collegiality among the officers' junta of the Derg. Section B deals with the response of the junta to Mengistu's challenge; and Section C with Mengistu's victory over the junta.

#### **(A) Mengistu's Challenge to the Officers' Junta**

As noted in the previous chapter, no less than seven pan-Ethiopianist organisations had sprang up on the political scene of Ethiopia by 1976. The proliferation of the pan-Ethiopian political organisations was matched

by an even greater number of secessionist movements, several of which had a much longer history than did the former. The most important of the secessionist movements were the Eritrean Liberation Front, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, the Tigrean People's Liberation Front, the Afar Liberation Front, the Orommo Liberation Front, and the Western Somalia Liberation Front.

By the autumn of 1976, three important coalitions seemed to emerge, which brought about co-operation between the pan-Ethiopianist and secession organisations, and in some cases involved the neighbouring states. The first of these coalitions concerned the conservative Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU). It has already been explained that the conservative states of the region like Saudi Arabia, North Yemen and the Sudan, had been growing uneasy about the Derg's radicalism,<sup>1</sup> and that this had facilitated the conclusion of an agreement (Summer, 1976) between EDU and two of the conservative secessionist movements (the Eritrean Liberation Front and the Afar Liberation Front) concerning joint military operations against the Derg.<sup>2</sup> As the result of these developments, EDU was able to broadcast hostile propaganda against the Derg from the Sudanese radio station and, more importantly, to have access to Ethiopian territory through the Sudan and Eritrea.

Thus EDU was able to engage the Derg's military forces in the Northern provinces of Gondar, Tigre, and Wollo. EDU's strength was furthered by the alliance it could forge with the local traditional leaders in the areas of its operations and, through them, in having access to the peasants from whom it could raise fighting men. Although agricultural tenancy had been abolished by the Derg's nationalisation of land, in the Northern provinces, where tenancy was, in any case, limited, the reforms were of less import. In a lot of the cases the tenants in one locality were, at the same time, landlords in another; and though there were sizeable minorities

whose members could only become tenants because they had no hereditary or other titles to land, they were too isolated to make a difference in the region's balance of power. On occasion the official media made out that certain of the bureaucracy was in secret league with EDU; however, EDU's urban presence in any organised form is extremely doubtful. As already noted, the essence of EDU's existence, according to its own programme, was the destruction of the Derg, just as the Derg's had become the destruction of the forces of reaction, under which category it included EDU.

The second coalition concerned the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) which had both a rural and an urban revolutionary strategy. Its early agitational successes among the peasants of Southern Ethiopia were coming unstuck, mainly as a result of a counter-campaign which portrayed the government as the primary agent of the land reform of 1975 and hence as the one which 'gave' the peasants their land. EPRP had no military presence in the South. In the Northern provinces, however, EPRP had bases and young revolutionary men and women under arms, drawn from among the student activists who were taking part in the campaign programme of the Derg. The success in the North could be explained, in part, by the receptiveness of the local population to agitation against the Derg, which could not be seen to have given land to many of them, and, in part, because the Derg could easily be portrayed as a dictatorial and illegitimate government. No less important to EPRP's success in the North was the agreement it reached with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (the radical wing of the Eritrean secessionist movement) conferring guerrilla training facilities and passage to the interior in exchange for recognition by EPRP of Eritrea's right to secede from Ethiopia.<sup>3</sup> Further, a lot of weapons in Assimba (one of EPRP's bases) had the insignia of some of the radical Palestinian factions. It is not clear whether the

weapons were delivered to EPRP as a result of a direct agreement between it and the factions, or transferred from the Eritrean People's Liberation Front; at any rate, it suggests that one or both organisations were working in collaboration with radical Palestinian movements. While the EPRP fighters in the countryside were recluses earning themselves the name of 'Cave Intellectuals', EPRP's urban armed struggle was pursued vigorously. In a relatively short period of time, it was able to infiltrate the unions and various other associations, and later the newly created Urban Dwellers' Associations. By the Summer of 1976 it looked poised to oust the Derg from power.

With the adoption of the NDRPE in April, 1976, and with the call by the programme and by Mengistu for the formation of a joint front among progressive forces, one might have expected that the gap between EPRP and the Derg would narrow and disappear. However, this was not so. While EPRP accepted the invitation to form a joint front in principle - and this was in itself a most dramatic deviation from its unwavering position against any firm co-operation with the Derg, - it attached so many conditions to its acceptance that it could only be taken as a rejection of the invitation.

First, it proposed five points that should be discussed by members of the joint front and incorporated into their common programme: the front must be led by the workers and must include the farmers, the petit bourgeoisie and other sections of the oppressed people; the front must be a forum for their united struggle against the reactionary classes, as well as a forum for struggling amongst themselves to promote the divergent interests within the oppressed classes; some sixteen enumerated mass organisations, movements and national and regional political groups must be represented in the front; the programme of the front must be discussed and adopted by member organisations; and all this must be

carried out publicly and not behind the backs of the people.

Secondly, EPRP demanded that in addition to its nine-point minimum programme (points which were not really different from those of the NDRPE) the following six should also be incorporated: all treaties concluded with imperialist states, especially with the US, West Germany and Israel, which were prejudicial to the interests of the people and to the independence of the country, were to be repealed; the right of national self-determination up to and including secession was to be recognised, especially for Eritrea, and the organisation leading the secessionist struggle in Eritrea was to be recognised as a legal representative of the people; the workers and peasants were to be armed immediately so that they could lead the revolution: the organisations that had become members of the joint front were to be given the freedom to agitate among the armed forces and recruit members from among them; since the bureaucracy, including the one within the armed forces and the police, had shown that it was anti-revolutionary, it should be demolished completely; and a provisional people's government was to be established by the forces that came under the joint front. EPRP also rejected POMOA because it was under the control of the government, because the appointment of its members was undemocratic, because it was not representative of the various progressive sections of the population and because it represented the interests and the voice of one narrow group.

The above were presented by EPRP as points of negotiation between it and the government; much more important, however, were the following five points which EPRP insisted had to be met by the government before negotiations on the previous points could begin. The five points were: the repeal of all laws that curtailed democratic rights and the enactment, in their place, of laws guaranteeing unlimited democratic rights for the

supporters of the anti-feudal, anti-imperialistic and anti-bureaucratic capitalist revolution, namely, the workers, farmers, the petit bourgeoisie and the groups and movements that represented these classes; the immediate cessation of military campaigns against the Eritreans and other nationalities; the immediate and unconditional cessation of massacres of the masses, like the workers and peasants, which was still going on; the immediate release from prison and the cessation of persecution of progressives (like workers, teachers, members and leaders of peasant associations, that had taken part in national movements) and of members of the armed forces and the police who had been arrested for their participation in political activities; and the publication on radio, in the press and other mass media of the fact that the government had accepted and implemented these points. EPRP concluded these conditions with an invitation of its own: if the government was unwilling to meet the above prerequisites and start negotiations, it was the historical duty of all progressive and democratic forces to join it (EPRP) and, without the involvement of the government, form a joint front.<sup>4</sup>

It is worth citing the above EPRP response to Mengistu's call for the formation of a joint front on April 20th, 1976, because it constituted the final rupture between EPRP and Mengistu's faction within the Derg, because it led to a division among the officers' junta of the Derg on the question of how to deal with the civilian left, and because it finally led to the white-red terror confrontation between EPRP and the third coalition.

The third coalition concerned the remaining five pan-Ethiopianist organisations of the left (the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM), the Ethiopian Oppressed Peoples' Revolutionary Struggle, the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organisation, the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame). It should be noted that

there was no obvious affiliation between these and any of the separatist movements and external powers, with the exception perhaps of the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Revolutionary Struggle which was commonly believed to have colluded with the Oromo-based secessionist movements. Also, AESM, which was the biggest of these political organisations, was becoming identified with the Southern part of the country because the North was dominated by EDU, EPRP and a string of secessionist movements and because, as an advocate of the Derg's land reform law, which 'granted' land to the tenants of the South, it could relate to the peasants more readily than could EPRP, which appeared to oppose the reform.

More importantly, however, all of the five organisations were urban-based, and whatever following they had was concentrated in the cities, and especially in Addis Ababa. With the acceptance by them of the government's NDRPE it became possible for them to dominate the official forums like POMOA, the Yekatit'66 Political School, the Urban Dwellers' Associations and, to a certain extent, the mass media. 'Revolutionary Ethiopia' (a paper of POMOA) which was also at their disposal became the instrument by which official ideology was expounded to the public. This third coalition used these forums to lump together the other two above-mentioned coalitions (those of EDU and EPRP) and condemn them with increasing monotony as reactionaries in league with imperialism, the CIA, the conservative Arab States, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism.

The five organisations which formed the coalition, were able to work closely with one another for different reasons. As noted in the previous chapter, the leader of the Workers' League was on POMOA's Commission helping draft the NDRPE with the leaders of AESM; there was hardly any difference between the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame; and AESM had worked very closely with the Ethiopian Oppressed Peoples Revolutionary Struggle and the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary

Organisation. When the NDRPE was finally adopted on April 21, 1976, it was easy for these groups to identify themselves with it and work under its prescriptions. By the summer, they had all expressed interest in the idea of forming a joint front among themselves, though the formal establishment of the front did not take place until February, 1977.

An important aspect of this third coalition was the fact that it included within it some of the most powerful members of the Derg, namely Mengistu Haile-Mariam and his faction. After the execution of Lt. General Aman Andom, Mengistu had been enjoying the most prominent position in the government as the first vice chairman of the Derg, because Aman's replacement as chairman (Brigadier General Teferi Banti) was relegated to presiding over the affairs of the subservient Council of Ministers, and since he was in any case a non-Derg member.

Also, Mengistu had formed his own faction within the Derg with the help of which he had created his political organisation (Revolutionary Flame). It was this faction that AESM had been referring to as 'the left wing of the Derg' further, AESM had been expressing interest in collaborating with that faction with a view to subsuming the remaining and willing members of the Derg under the joint leadership of Revolutionary Flame and AESM and ousting the unwilling members of the Derg from power.

There is perhaps no need to raise the question of whether the third coalition was the brain-child of AESM's leaders or a result of Mengistu's drive to effect a rupture among the civilian left and bring a section of it under his influence. The fact remains, nonetheless, that the formation of Revolutionary Flame and the *modus vivendi* arrived at between the fire organisation including Revolutionary Flame was to boost Mengistu's power base within and outside the Derg. For his actions in the Derg, Mengistu could now count on the support of the Derg members who were at the same time members of

Revolutionary Flame as well as those Derg members who were also adherents of the four other political organisations within the coalition. Further, he could now play a more effective role in influencing the government and non-governmental organisations through the cadres of the five groups.

This turn of events threw grit into the collective operation of the officers' junta, which had survived intact the adoption of the radical socio-economic reforms of 1975 and the NDRPE of April 1976. In the first place, the mere fact of the emergence of relatively strong political organisations and their close association with the Derg led its members to become suspicious of each other's affiliations with the political organisations. The affiliation of Mengistu's faction in the Derg to the third coalition was obvious; though there is no concrete evidence to show that the remaining members of the Derg were full-fledged members of one political organisation or another, it was also obvious that some among them were at least sympathisers or supporters of the other coalitions, especially that of EPRP. As a result, the officers junta was unable to speak with one voice about the approach to be taken towards the civilian left.

More important were Mengistu's rallying of the third coalition around himself (with the result that he could now influence the outcome of events within and outside the Derg more effectively than ever before) and AESM's 'exaltation' of Mengistu's faction as the left wing of the Derg and its condemnation of the rest as reactionaries who needed to be brought under the leadership of Mengistu's coalition or else ousted from their positions. This was an open threat to the position of power of the members of the officers' junta that requires no further explanation.

Yet another point of friction was the Eritrean question, on which two parallel and contradictory policies were emerging at the time. In his address to the nation on April 20, 1976, concerning NDRPE, Mengistu

had classified the Eritrean separatists at being in the camp of anti-revolutionaries ( on an equal footing with landlords and the EDU) because, he argued, they had failed to form a joint front with Ethiopian progressives (as the Chinese communists and nationalists had done against Japan) and because they had instead attacked the revolution in collaboration with the conservative Arab States and the West.<sup>5</sup> About the same time, the government had launched a militia mobilisation campaign ( apparently intended to raise some 400,000-strong peasant army, especially in the Northern provinces) and had started marching them north for deployment in Eritrea as of the end of May. EPRP opposed the move as being genocidal between oppressed brothers, as unlikely to succeed and as going against the successful outcome of the revolution.<sup>6</sup> EDU went further and claimed that it had helped to defeat the peasant march by attacking them on their way to Eritrea.<sup>7</sup>

By contrast, there was a policy in Eritrea which was issued on May 17, 1976, under the title 'A Policy Intended to Solve the Eritrean Problem Peacefully'. It was a nine point policy, one point of which provided that the government would give full support for the co-operation of Ethiopian and Eritrean progressives to agitate, organise and lead the working people of Eritrea on the basis of NDRPE and to facilitate the unity of the Ethiopian and Eritrean broad masses.<sup>8</sup>

The expectation of certain sections of the civilian left was that the adoption by Ethiopia of Marxism-Leninism would subsume under it contending ideologies, (like religion and nationalism including both its chauvinist and local variants), and bring about greater unity within the country. Contrary to such expectations, however, it led to the emergence of warring factions among its proponents, -factionalism which later engulfed members of the Derg. This turn of events led to a great deal of friction, not only among the civilian left but also among the officers' junta, over questions

like ideology , the civilian left and Eritrea and, most importantly, over the question of power. Arguably, these were in the final analysis, responsible for the bloody confrontation that followed in the wake of the adoption of NDRPE.

#### **(B) The Decline of Mengistu's Coalition**

The first to challenge Mengistu's newly acquired prominence was Sisay's group. After Majors Mengistu Haile-Mariam and Atnafu Abate (first and second vice-chairman of the Derg, respectively), Major Sisay Habte was the most influential member of the Derg, being entrusted with the task of heading the Political and Foreign Relations Department of the Derg. He was an air force major and, according to Rene Lefort, a radical intellectual with a master's degree from an American University and the architect of the rapprochement between the Derg and the civilian left.<sup>9</sup> Probably, he was also the most important author of 'Ethiopian Socialism' and an important contributor to the drafting and adoption of NDRPE.

It has already been noted that the functions of organising and politicising the masses was entrusted to POMOA when it was established along with the adoption of NDRPE. This meant that the day-to-day operation of those functions was overseen by Haile Fida, who was the chairman of POMOA and the leader of AESM, with Sisay's role in these matters being limited to sitting on POMOA's supervisory body (the Supreme Organising Committee) chaired by Mengistu.<sup>10</sup> As a result, Sisay's role in domestic politics was substantially curtailed. The activities of his department (Political and Foreign Affairs) was limited to overseeing the operations of the Foreign Office; as far as regards receiving diplomats and foreign guests, the chairman and first vice-chairman of the Derg had precedence over him.

Apart from the narrowing down of the scope of his functions, or perhaps, because of it, Sisay found himself at odds with Mengistu over certain matters. One instance of this concerned EPRP's rejection of Mengistu's call for the formation of a joint front among progressive organisations. After this incident, Mengistu wanted nothing else but the declaration of an all-out war against EPRP; Sisay, on the other hand, sought to pursue a more conciliatory approach towards that Organisation. Needless to say, AESM aided and abetted Mengistu's position.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Sisay and Mengistu were at odds over the Eritrean question. After the May declaration of the nine-point policy concerning Eritrea, a committee led by Sisay had started secret negotiations with the leaders of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front. However, the negotiation was not making much headway, not least because Haile Fida, who was also on the committee, was at loggerheads with Sisay on this question as on all others. As opposed to Mengistu who went for the aggressive policy on Eritrea as described earlier, Sisay apparently sought to give a chance to the peace offensive as reflected in the nine-point policy declaration of the Derg.

In early July, Captain Moges Wolde-Michael led a high delegation to Moscow to explain Ethiopia's adoption of Scientific Socialism and to seek economic aid. <sup>12</sup> Apparently, Sisay was supposed to lead that delegation but had declined when asked to do so, perhaps because he was preoccupied with other concerns. On July 10, he is said to have launched an abortive coup d'état which, according to most observers, was directed against Mengistu. The coup is said to have involved Major Kiros Alemayehu (head of the National Campaign Department), Lt. Sileshi Beyene (member of the Political and Foreign Affairs Department), General Nadew Zekarias (commander of the armed forces in Eritrea and a non-Derg member) and many more non-Derg members, mostly from the armed forces. Some nineteen of these including Sisay and Getachew Nadew

were arrested by Daniel Haile (head of the Derg's Security Command) and executed on 13 July.<sup>13</sup> A month later, Kiros was reported to have committed suicide while in prison;<sup>14</sup> Negash and a Lt. Colonel Alemayehu Asfaw of the paratroop battalion, who was not a member of the Derg, defected to the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and to EPRP, respectively.<sup>15</sup>

It is not clear whether Daniel's move against Sisay and his group was authorised by the Derg as suggested by John Spencer<sup>16</sup>, or by Mengistu acting on his own behalf as suggested by most other observers. In fact, Rene Lefort takes the second proposition further and suggests that, in a July 16 General Assembly meeting of the Derg, one member demanded that Mengistu explain by what right he had alone decided the execution of Aman Andom a few years earlier and that of Sisay and his group then. Mengistu reacted by demanding the arrest of the questioner but the Derg refused to grant the request.<sup>17</sup> The speed with which the action was taken against Sisay's group and its similarity with the earlier circumstances in which Aman and others were executed dictates the conclusion that Mengistu and his close associates did indeed perpetrate the summary execution of the group upon discovering the possibility of the existence of a plot to overthrow the government.

Obviously, the General Assembly of the Derg was called to a meeting after the event; it was called in order to get an explanation of the incident. Sisay was accused of having been in the habit of changing his flight schedules whenever he was sent abroad on missions in order to make contacts with agents of imperialism, and of having refused to undertake his revolutionary duty of leading a high level delegation to the Soviet Union. Apparently, such allegations were first made by EPRP and what the General Assembly was being asked to believe was that the reason EPRP accused Sisay was because they intended to cover up the existence of their collusion with him.<sup>18</sup> It is not clear whether Sisay was accused in

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the Assembly of having planned to overthrow the government, but the official line has since been to compare Pinochet's coup against Salvador Allende to the abortive 'counter-coup' of Sisay, in alliance with EPRP, the Eritrean Liberation Front and the CIA against the Ethiopian revolution. However, there is no independent evidence to show whether Sisay's group sought to pursue an even-handed policy towards the civilian left in general or whether it was sympathetic towards EPRP and even collaborating with it in order to get rid of Mengistu's coalition. What is more, it is not clear whether the Derg was convinced by Mengistu's explanations at all.

The elimination of Sisay and his group only deepened the crisis of the officers' junta and opened the way for the Assembly of the Derg to reassert itself even if only temporarily. In the first place, the issues over which Sisay and Mengistu had been at odds (what to do with the civilian left, the disastrous peasant march, the Eritrean question in general and the jockeying of members of the officers' junta for positions of influence) continued to be divisive. Also, such important positions as had been occupied by Sisay and Kiros had to be filled by new individuals to be elected by the Assembly. To make matters worse, the old rivalry between Mengistu Haile-Mariam and Atnafu Abate resurfaced in the Assembly's proceedings, especially over conflicting claims by the two concerning what matters should come under their respective jurisdictions, and over Atnafu's accusation that Mengistu was becoming a dictator. Unable to resolve all these difficulties and convinced of the clumsiness of its own proceedings, the General Assmebly asked Mengistu and Atnafu to leave the meeting and instituted a fifteen-man committee mostly made up of the department heads. Moges Wolde-Michael was appointed chairman of the committee. Judging by the outcome, the committee's mandate appears to have been not only to delimit closely the functions of Mengistu and Atnafu

(first and second vice-chairmen respectively) but also to overhaul the structure of the Derg once more. The committee's deliberations lasted from August to December, 1976.<sup>19</sup>

In the meantime the propaganda warfare between EPRP and Mengistu's coalition was stepped up, followed by an armed confrontation between them as of the second half of September. A lengthy article written in the official daily (Addis Zemen) in early September referred to EPRP by name for the first time, and argued that it was not the workers' vanguard party but that in reality it was an anarchist organisation since it had destroyed property and since it had instigated workers to go on strike. In conclusion, the article called upon the Ethiopian people to expose EPRP, and promised that the government would place at the disposal of the people anything required to fight the Organisation.<sup>20</sup> Within a few days, another article of the same paper claimed that EPRP had destroyed 80 million Birrs worth (about 40 million US Dollars) of agricultural products in the two provinces of Shoa and Arsi alone and that Mengistu and other members of the Derg had gone to the places of destruction and seen it all for themselves.<sup>21</sup> These articles were written in the name of the Derg; they must, however, have been the result of multiple sovereignty, since it is difficult to imagine that all of the Derg or junta membership would have endorsed them.

The tenor of the language used by these Addis Zemen articles was in keeping with that of POMOA's paper Revolutionary Ethiopia, which also mentioned EPRP by name for the first time instead of referring to it indirectly as an anarchist or a petit-bourgeois organisation as it had previously done. In September, the paper argued that the differences between EPRP and the Ethiopian progressives was not a case of two lines among progressives but between reactionaries and progressives (between EPRP, EDU and imperialism, on the one hand, and Ethiopian progressives, on the other). It concluded by

repeating its call for the arming of the masses against the reactionaries. 22

Conscious of the increasingly aggressive stance of Mengistu's coalition against EPRP since the latter's rejection of the call for the formation of the joint front, the central committee of EPRP had, by September met and decided to conduct urban armed struggle against the coalition and had authorised its politburo to map out a strategy. The latter met in October and decided to intensify both rural and urban armed struggle, provoke general insurrection, and in this way pressurise Mengistu's coalition into submission<sup>23</sup>. EPRP's defence and operation squads had already been put in place and had gone into action by the second half of September, in accordance with the decisions of its central committee. The face of a suspected 'anti-people' individual (one who was suspected of being a supporter of Mengistu's coalition) was followed up mainly by the mass organisations of EPRP (the organisations for the youth, women and workers) and, based on information provided by them, the appropriate organ of the Party decided whether he was to be eliminated or not. In the event that he was found guilty, it was up to the Operation Squad to hijack a car, kidnap him and hand him over to a Defence Squad for action. Many others were simply gunned down in their places of work or residence or while walking in the streets. 24

The first intended victim was Mengistu himself; towards the end of September, an assassination attempt was made on him, but he survived it with a minor injury<sup>25</sup>. The first real victim was Fikre Merid (a prominent member of AESM and of POMOA's Commission) who was shot and killed in his car while waiting to collect his wife from work. His two assassins were caught shortly afterwards.<sup>26</sup> Towards the end of October, the EPRP exploded an incendiary device in the Yekatit 1966 Political School with damage to life and property<sup>27</sup>. The urban armed struggle had begun in earnest.

According to most observers, the Derg had restricted Mengistu's freedom of action after his August confrontation with members of the officers' junta, but perhaps relaxed it after the onset of the armed struggle with EPRP<sup>28</sup>. He certainly was able to pay EPRP back double and triple the losses to his side. Nevertheless, the relaxation did not go as far as freely arming the mass organisations, especially the urban dwellers associations, and unleashing them on EPRP. For the time being, therefore, Mengistu's coalition had to satisfy itself with using the mass media and the forums of the mass organisations to condemn EPRP and to demand the arming of the broad masses.<sup>29</sup>

In early November, the second round of elections of Addis Ababa urban dwellers associations' leaders was held<sup>30</sup>. At the time, Revolutionary Ethiopia complained that the urban dwellers' associations had not rejected EPRP, as peasant associations had done, and insisted that, like the latter, the urban dwellers' associations should create their own revolutionary committees as well as defence squads and take 'revolutionary action' (summary executions) against anti-revolutionaries.<sup>31</sup> A few weeks later, the same paper blamed EPRP for starting terrorism during the previous September and compared it to how the 'Petit-Bourgeois social democrats' started terrorism during the Soviet Revolution and even wounded Lenin. The paper concluded by citing the Soviet Government's reaction: 'all reactionaries and those who support them will be held responsible for assassination attempts against workers and against those who struggle for a socialist revolution. The government of the workers and peasants will counter the reactionary terror of its enemies and launch a general terror against the bourgeoisie and their agents'<sup>32</sup>. The theoretical basis of the red-white terror that was to engulf the urban centres of Ethiopia as of early 1977 was laid out thus.

While Mengistu's coalition was thus locked into an urban armed struggle with EPRP, it was surprised by a

further and drastic clipping of its wings. This was done in the name of reforming the structure of the Derg through a legislation drawn by the fifteen-men committee appointed by the Derg in August 1976. The legislation (Proclamation 108/1976) came into force on December 29, 1976. According to it, the Derg was to continue to enjoy the legislative and executive powers discussed in Chapter 2 above. Instead of a general assembly, subcommittees and a kind of central committee, the relationships between which were never clear, the Derg was now to have a Congress consisting of all Derg members, a Central Committee of forty Derg members, and a Standing Committee of seventeen Derg members. It was provided that the members of the last two committees were to be elected by the Congress.<sup>33</sup>

Under the new arrangement, General Teferi Bante became not only the effective chairman of the three organs of the Derg (the Congress, the Central Committee and the Standing Committee), but also the head of state, the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, chairman of the Defence and Security Council, conferrer of high appointments and promotions, supervisor of the implementation of the decisions of the three organs of the Derg and of the Council of Ministers, and the one who approves the decision of the Council of Ministers etc.<sup>34</sup> Previously, he had been the chairman of the Derg, but only in name; his real task had been presiding over the affairs of the subservient Council of Ministers - in effect, a prime minister subject to the whims of the officers' junta of the Derg.

Atnafu Abate retained not only his position as second vice-chairman of the Derg but, in addition to being responsible for heading the militia, was put in charge of their politicisation, organisation and arming. Further, a new and key post (Secretary General of the Derg) was created and given to Captain Alemayehu Haile who was one of the prominent members of the committee which drafted the law under consideration. As such, he

was responsible for acting as the secretary general of the three organs of the Derg, managing the secretariat and budget of the Derg, co-ordinating the activities of the three organs of the Derg, channelling to each matters forming within its jurisdiction and ensuring that decisions of the three organs were transmitted to and implemented by the relevant officers.<sup>35</sup> These three men (Teferi Atnafu and Alemayehu) became the main functionaries of the Derg after the December reorganisation.

Mengistu, on the other hand, was stripped of practically all his Derg functions. Since he was a member of the Derg and since he had retained his first vice-chairmanship, he could attend the proceedings of the three organs of the Derg and vote in them; further, he was specifically authorised to act in place of the chairman in his absence. Otherwise, he was given as his main task the previous functions of Teferi Bante, namely, presiding over the functions of the Council of Ministers. As such his tasks consisted of chairing the meeting of the Council of Ministers, making administrative decisions on matters referred to him by individual ministries and other government agencies,<sup>36</sup> and submitting to the head of state (Teferi Bante) periodic reports concerning the activities of the Council of Ministers.<sup>37</sup> In carrying out his duties, Mengistu was responsible not only to the three organs of the Derg (as were Teferi, Atnafu and Alemayehu)<sup>38</sup>, but also to the Council of Ministers which he was supposed to lead.<sup>39</sup> Under the previous arrangement, Mengistu had all the powers that were now given to Teferi.

Apparently, Mengistu's reverses were not limited to him but extended to his supporters in the Derg who were also stripped of their Derg functions and assigned to the provinces or sent abroad, ostensibly for political education. For example, Lt. Col. Mersha Admassu was posted to Eritrea. Captain Ashebir Amare to Tigrai, and Lt. Col. Zeleke Beyene to Hararghe while Lt. Col. Teka

Tulu, Lt. Col. Getachew Shibeshi, and Lt. Col. Gebreyes Wolde-hana were sent to East European countries for political education.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, the legislation sought to divest Mengistu's coalition not only of governmental functions but also of any role in political activities. It did this by abolishing POMOA's supervisory body (the Supreme Organising Committee, chaired by Mengistu) and by bringing it under the direct control of the organs of the Derg. This meant that Mengistu's role in the politicisation and organisation of the masses was removed completely, while his supporters in POMOA's commission, who were very much in the majority, could be removed or their functions restricted by the Derg. Thus, it was up to the Derg's Congress to issue directives on the establishment of political parties and mass organisations;<sup>41</sup> up to the Central Committee to ensure the implementation of the political and other policies of the country;<sup>42</sup> and up to the Standing Committee to:

issue directives on the enforcement of democratic rights and to take the necessary measures to give political consciousness, to organise and arm the broad masses with a view to making the NDRP achieve its objectives.<sup>43</sup>

If under the new arrangement any individual Derg member was intended to have powers over political matters, it could only have been Alemayehu who, as secretary general of the Derg, was made responsible for ensuring that all decisions of the three organs were transmitted to, and implemented by, 'the concerned officers'<sup>44</sup>, a term which certainly includes government agencies, like POMOA, but perhaps also mass organisations. Obviously, such a strategic position would provide the secretary general with a great deal of room for manoeuvring developments in the sphere of political activities.

**(C) Mengistu's Ascent to Absolute Power: "The Revolution is Transformed from a Defensive to an Offensive Position"**

In his address to the nation on January 29, 1977, Teferi Bante condemned the conservative Arab states for supporting EDU and the Eritrean separatists with a view to making the Red Sea an Arab lake of peace; and the leaders of the Sudan and Somalia for posing a threat to Ethiopia's integrity and revolution by claiming that the country was weak and divided and trying to exploit that situation. He admitted that, because of the revolution and ensuing power struggle, there had emerged many groups with immense differences among them and that the differences were affecting not only the integrity but also the economy of the country and that, had they been more careful previously, the groups would have formed a joint front and a party by then. He concluded by stating:

What we beg of Ethiopian progressives and intellectuals at this hour and from this platform is that there must be unity; a party must be established; a joint front must be formed; and, until that happens, our revolution will always be in danger.<sup>45</sup>

Two days later, Teferi reiterated the same sentiments in another speech delivered to a rally of the people of Addis Ababa in Revolution Square.<sup>46</sup>

The uneasy truce between the groups of Mengistu and Teferi in the Derg finally came to a head-on collision. On February 3, there was a great deal of gun fire in the headquarters of the Derg for all Addis Ababans to hear. On the next day, it was explained that 'revolutionary action' had been taken against some seven Derg members : General Teferi Bante, Captain Alemayehu Haile, Captain Moges Wolde-Michael, Lt. Col. Asrat Desta, Lt. Col. Hirui Haile-Selassie, Captain Tefera Deneke, and Corporal Haile Belay. It was further explained that these were agents of EPRP and EDU in the Derg, because Teferi had failed to

condemn EPRP in his speeches of January 29 and 31, and because, as a forty-seven page programme of theirs showed, they had planned to reverse the revolution by rehabilitating EPRP, kidnapping progressives, abolishing POMOA and by executing a fascist coup d'état in collaboration with imperialism and neighbouring conservative states. Finally, the explanation declared that the revolution had been transformed from a defensive to an offensive position.<sup>47</sup> In his February 4 address to a rally of Addis Ababans, Mengistu lumped together those killed on the previous day with EPRP, EDU, the Eritrean Liberation Front, the conservative states of the region and imperialism, as enemies of the Ethiopian revolution.<sup>48</sup>

Obviously, these were some of the differences which had divided Mengistu's and Sisay's groups and which must have continued to divide the officers' junta of the Derg thereafter. More important was, however, the power-struggle in the officers' junta partly provoked by these differences. All observers agree that the group which was eliminated on February 3 was not led by Teferi, who, according to them was used as a pawn in the power struggle, but by Alemayehu and Moges and that it was the same group which had stripped Mengistu's coalition of practically all governmental and political functions in the previous December. There is, however, no evidence to show that Teferi's group sought to take this further and eliminate members of Mengistu's group or dismiss them from the Derg, nor is there evidence to show that they were intending to abandon the NDRPE altogether (as suggested by the accusation that they had planned 'a fascist coup d'état' in alliance with imperialist powers). More likely than not, Teferi's group was trying to pursue an even-handed policy towards the civilian left in accordance with a recommendation made to the Derg by a committee in the Intelligence department which was created to instigate the real causes of the EPRP-AESM frictions. Apparently the committee interviewed some of

the leaders of the two organisations, found the EPRP was incensed by the fact that the Derg or a section of it should collude with AESM, and recommended that the Derg as a government should stand aloof from factional feuds.

The circumstances suggest that the move against Teferi's group was not a case of Mengistu taking advantage of a shoot-out that took place on February 3 nor a case of Mengistu's reaction to Teferi's speeches on 29 and 31 of January, as suggested by Rene Lefort and others<sup>49</sup>, but a plan carefully worked out over time. It has been argued earlier that it was Mengistu who first formed a coalition with the civilian left with a view to bringing all members of the derg under the leadership of the coalition, and ousting from power those unwilling to co-operate, and that this initiative of Mengistu's caused a disequilibrium within the officers' junta, from the time when Sisay's and Teferi's groups rebelled. It would appear that Mengistu had foreseen that some members of the junta would react against his initiative (as did Sisay's and Teferi's groups) and that he had been prepared to meet such a contingency. Further Mengistu and his coalition accepted their decline from August to January as something temporary, not least because they were acting defiantly throughout that time. The member organisations of the coalition were busy not only fighting it out with the EPRP on the military and propaganda levels but also mobilizing the mass organisations and cadres to reject Teferi's group and come to their support.<sup>50</sup> It is also worth noting that the individuals killed during the February shooting were only those who were responsible for assigning Mengistu to an inferior government position and stripping him of his roles in political activities. In fact, according to some reliable sources, it was the greatly feared Lt. Col. Daniel Asefaw (head of the Derg's Security Department), Dr. Senaye Likke and Mengistu who planned the coup and presided over its execution. Apparently, when Yohannis (a supporter of Teferi's group and the second head of the

Derg's Security Command) learnt of what had happened, he opened fire at Daniel and Senaye killing the first and fatally wounding the second. It seems he also went for Mengistu but was cornered and killed in the process.

Be that as it may, the February 3 incident opened the way for Mengistu's meteoric ascent to the heights of absolutism. On February 12 a proclamation 110/1977 (amending Proclamation 108/1976 which had reorganised the structure of the Derg during the previous December) was issued<sup>51</sup> and it was announced that Mengistu and Atnafu were elected as chairman and vice-chairman, respectively, by the Derg.<sup>52</sup> Thus, not only did Mengistu inherit all the powers of Teferi as noted earlier, but was also authorised by the amended version of the legislation to retain his prime ministerial position.<sup>53</sup> Further, the amended version created a completely new power and entrusted it to the chairman of the Derg, namely, the power to take measures against 'anti-people and counter-revolutionary elements'.<sup>54</sup> All the amendments introduced in the new legislation had to do with the powers and responsibilities of the chairman. It is believed, nonetheless, that a consideration of the chairman's relations with the organs of the Derg and of the continued dispersal of the Derg members will throw more light on the matter than a discussion of the amended provisions of the new legislation.

The chairman was directed to exercise his powers and responsibilities in accordance with directives issued to him by the Congress, the Central Committee and the standing Committee<sup>55</sup>. This, coupled with the mandate of the Congress to take 'serious' measures against offending Derg members, seemed to suggest that the chairman's powers were not absolute. Unlike the Standing Committee, which was declared to be responsible to the Congress and to the Central Committee (and to which it was bound to submit periodic reports)<sup>56</sup> no similar obligations existed for the chairman, thus depriving the organs of the Derg of any effective means of evaluating whether he had

carried out their directives or not. Also, it was provided that the Congress could take serious measures against Derg members only at the recommendation of the Standing Committee<sup>57</sup>; should the Congress discover dereliction of duty committed by the chairman in some way and seek to take measures against him, it would first have to overcome the difficulty of securing a recommendation from the Standing Committee which could only be convened by the Chairman himself<sup>58</sup>. In addition, if members of the Congress sought to challenge Mengistu, there was always the concern that they might also face the fate of those who had done that in the past (like Aman, Sisay, Teferi and their associates). At any rate, according to the drafters of Proclamation 108, the new structure 110 was intended to enable the Derg to operate on the basis of Marxist-Leninist principles<sup>59</sup>, -principles which in practice have been seen to favour a highly centralised monolithic government structure rather than the more diffuse structure of the separation of powers operating on the basis of checks and balances.

When all is said and done, the organs of the Derg did not survive Mengistu's February coup d'état; they could, therefore, not restrain any absolutist tendencies on the part of the chairman. During the Congress's first meeting after the coup (May, 1977), it was agreed that the Congress should be convened once a year and the Central Committee twice a year. This in itself would not have given the two organs adequate time to discharge the multitude of functions entrusted to them by the Law;<sup>60</sup> the fact remains, nevertheless, that no such formal meetings have really ever since been held by either of the organs concerned. No doubt, there have been several meetings held in the name of the Congress but those meetings involved only those Derg members that happened to be in the capital city at the time; in any case, such meetings, of which there were about four, persisted only until the middle of 1978. The only way in which the Congress (the Derg) survived as a body was in its annual

June 28 meetings held not to discharge its legal functions (as envisaged by Proclamation 110/1977 and by the May 1977 decision of the Congress) but to commemorate the establishment of the Derg on June 28, 1974.

As individuals, however, Derg members continued to enjoy privileged positions in various departments of the government. It has previously been noted that their assignment to positions outside the Derg (to offices in the capital as well as the provinces) had begun as early as 1974. In August 1978, this trend was reinforced when six Derg members were appointed as chief administrators of provinces,<sup>61</sup> and when within three months of that twelve of the fourteen provinces were given similar administrators.<sup>62</sup> Many more Derg members were appointed as administrators of subprovinces or given positions in various other departments mainly in the capital.

The idea of assigning Derg members to government departments was instituted by the Derg for the purposes of using them as watch-dogs in their places of work. However, their function was never sufficiently articulated until December 1976 when a Directive was issued along with Proclamation 108/1976. The Directive provided, inter alia, that Derg members assigned to government departments were to act as senior cadres in their places of work and oversee the implementation of the NDRPE, and were to politicise, organise and to arm the masses, the people's militia and the revolution squads; in addition it stipulated that government officials had a duty to collaborate in helping the high political officers (members of the Derg) carry out their functions.<sup>63</sup>

Obviously, the functions of these Derg members overlapped with those of POMOA and the Joint Front of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organisations,<sup>64</sup> and their functionaries. POMOA was brought under the direct control of the Derg's Standing Committee by Proclamation 108/1976; this status of POMOA was retained by Proclamations 110 and 119 of February and July 1977,

respectively.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, the Derg members assigned to various government departments were directly accountable to the Standing Committee which in the final analysis meant Mengistu himself. Interestingly enough, he played the Derg members against POMOA's functionaries especially those in the provinces, with the result that the influence of the former fluctuated until the establishment of the Commission of the Organisation of the Ethiopian Workers' party in early 1980. More often than not, however, the Derg members enjoyed a very privileged position in the society, exacting deference as factions of a head of state- a hangover from proclamation 1 and 2 of September 1974, which made all Derg members collectively head of state - rather than a reflection of Proclamation 108 of December, 1976, and 110 of February 1977, which appointed the chairman of the Derg as the only head of state. It must be noted, nevertheless, that the continued enjoyment of power and prestige rested on their loyalty to Mengistu and not on their membership of the Derg.

The absence of the Congress and Central Committee raises the very important question of who was to exercise the functions that had been entrusted to them by Law. Unlike those of the latter, the powers of the Congress were extensive and crucial, especially as far as policy-making was concerned. For example, according to Proclamation 110/1977, a government department prepares a draft budget and submits it to the Council of Ministers,<sup>66</sup> which, with or without amendments, passes it on to the Congress through its chairman (Mengistu)<sup>67</sup>, since the organ of the Derg was the one authorised to approve the consolidated budget of the nation.<sup>68</sup> This was the procedure for the adoption of a Proclamation the most important kind of Law in the country; that type of law was the instrument by which all important policies of the central government were promulgated. In other words, law-making power was given to the Congress of the Derg

and not to the Central Committee, the Standing Committee or the chairman of the Derg.

Of these Derg organs, it was only the Standing Committee which was retained as a body; it continued to hold fairly regular meetings under the chaimanship of Mengistu, until at least the formation of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia in 1984, when it, with the addition of more members, became the politburo of the Party. As noted earlier, draft Proclamations ended up at the desk of the Derg's chaيمان since he was at the same time the Chairman of the Council of Ministers. The relevant question is whether he submitted such Proclamations to the meetings of the Standing Committee or simply promulgated them as Laws. Obviously, he was under no obligation to submit them since the Standing Committee lacked competence over the matter. As a matter of practice, however, it appears that he submitted some Proclamations and not others; he retained the power to issue Proclamations with or without consulting the Standing Committee and with or without his own amendments. As it happens, it is not uncommon to hear departmental officials complaining about their draft Proclamations rusting away on the shelves of the chairman's office, either because he did not like the contents of the draft legislations or because he could not spare the time to review them, whereas Proclamations initiated by him would be issued readily. This was the way that major policies and legislations were adopted at least until the inauguration of a new Constitution in 1987. The legislation under consideration (Proclamation 110/1977) had an impressive-looking list of functions that had to be discharged by the Standing Committee collectively. However, there was a separate provision in the same legislation which directly or through interpretation could be said to confer the same functions on the chairman.<sup>69</sup> This meant that the chairman could convene the Standing Committee in order to discharge the functions collectively or refrain from exercising his

power of convening the Committee and fall back on his power to discharge the functions personally. If there were certain functions that fell within the exclusive domain of the Standing Committee, they were relatively unimportant and in any case could not be discharged by the Committee without it having to rely on the Chairman convening a meeting. The difference between the Standing Committee and its predecessor (the Adhoc Supreme Organising Committee) was the difference between personal and collective responsibility; while the first could be accused of being a more dictatorial scheme than the second, it has in its favour the fact that it could and did bring order to the Derg which had been subject to a series of convulsions in its previous few years of existence.

All this is at any rate in the realm of theory; perhaps, the practice would throw a clearer light upon the question. The Chairman always came to the meetings with a ready-made decision; he would arrive at such a decision in consultation with anyone from within or outside the government, including diplomats, and then impose it on the members of the Standing Committee. By all accounts, the main function of the members in the Committee was to make a caricature of the correctness of the chairman's sentiments and positions on the matter under consideration.

The only member who is widely believed to have even aired his opinions in the meeting, without necessarily contradicting the chairman, was, and is, Captain Fikre Selassie Wog-deres (then General Secretary of the Derg). This procedural scheme (of processing a decision through a brow-beaten meeting after it has already been made outside) later became so well established, particularly in the activities of political organisations and the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, that it had a name specially coined for it, namely, 'organisational operation'.

Moreover the obedience of the Standing Committee members was exacted by the memory of the fate of those

who had dared to challenge Mengistu in the past (like Aman, Sisay, Teferi and their associates) and by his readiness to exercise his power 'of taking measures against anti-people and anti-revolutionary elements'. The last to fall prey to the excesses perpetrated against prominent Derg members was Atnafu Abate who was the vice-chairman of the Derg and a member of the Standing Committee. On November 13, 1977, he was executed in as mysterious a manner as Aman and the others. The official charges against him were numerous but on the whole revolved around the accusation that he had always been reactionary and continued to be so, despite advice against it by members of the Derg.<sup>70</sup> From the circumstances of the time and the emphasis made in the charges against him, it appears that the main bone of contention between him and Mengistu was the desire by the latter to 'intensify' the 'red terror', against EPRP, extending it to include AESM which had fallen out with Mengistu's coalition three months earlier. Atnafu appears to have pleaded moderation on this as well as on the government's radical stance on a number of political questions.

According to the official reports, Atnafu was executed in pursuance of a decision of the Congress which was adopted during a November meeting held in its name<sup>71</sup> - a decision which it could adopt legitimately under its mandate 'to take serious measures against Derg members'.<sup>72</sup> According to other sources, the decision was taken by Mengistu personally<sup>73</sup> - a decision which, arguably, came under his mandate 'to take measures against anti-people and anti-revolutionary elements'.<sup>74</sup> Be that as it may, the demise of the man who had done much more than anyone else to bring about the formation of the Derg in the first place meant the abolition of the office of the vice-chairman and the gobbling up of the functions of that office by Mengistu. As always, he was the beneficiary (in terms of powers gained) of the executions of prominent Derg members.

The size of the Standing Committee was reduced from 17 to 16 because of the abolition of the office of the second vice-chairman in the February reorganisations of the Derg. The bulk of the members of the Standing Committee would have been members of his coalitions; their promotion to that status was no doubt a reward for the support they had given to Mengistu in his struggle against members of the officers' junta who were opposed to his assertion of power. With the exception of Fikre-Selassie Wog-deres and Teka Tulu ( who are widely believed to have been members of the Worker's League and the Ethiopian Oppressed Peoples' Revolutionary Struggle, respectively) and Atnafu, who was neutral, the others were most probably founder members of Mengistu's political organisation (Revolutionary Flame). Since these organisations as well as AESM and the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organisation had together formed a coalition effectively, under the leadership of Mengistu, they had obviously taken a common stand against the EPRP and EDU coalitions and against those in the Derg who went against the wishes of their coalition.

Thus, the strength of the Standing Committee members rested not so much on the power they were to wield collectively but on the loyalty they had and continued to have for Mengistu. Over the years, the Derg Sub-committees which were established to oversee particular spheres of government activities had been moving away from being run by Derg sub-committees and begun turning into departments run by the chairman of the sub-committees. It was these offices that the members of the Standing Committee inherited from their disgraced predecessors in February 1977. As heads of these departments, they emerged as the most powerful men in the country after Mengistu; they became his personal assistants in matters coming within their competence. Each one of them was in charge of one or more government departments and, as such, exacted as much deference from their subordinates as did Mengistu from they themselves.

However, the process of running spheres of government activities through individuals rather than subcommittees was not complete in 1977; the two concepts of 'subcommittees' and 'departments' are, therefore, used interchangeably in the list of names given below. The military ranks given are as they stood at the time. According to the February 1977 reorganisations, the members of the Standing Committee were as follows:

1. Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile-Mariam: First Vice-Chairman (June 1974-February 1977), and Chairman (February 1977 -);
2. Lt. Col. Atnafu Abate; Second Vice-Chairman (June 1974-)
3. Captain Fikre-Selassie Wog-Deres: member of the Social Affairs Subcommittee (1974- August 1976), head of the Revolutionary Campaign Department (August- December 1976), and General Secretary (February 1977-);
4. Major Fissiha Desta: member of the Administration Subcommittee (1974-1977), and joint head of the Administration and Legal Affairs Subcommittee (February 1977 - );
5. Col. Tesfaye Gebre-Kidan; Chairman of the Defence Administration Subcommittee (1974 - February 1977), and joint head of the same Subcommittee (February 1977- )
6. Major Hadis Tedla: member of the Defence Administration Subcommittee (1974 - December 1976), and joint head of the same Subcommittee (February 1977 -)
7. Sergeant Legese Asfaw: personal assistant to Mengistu (1974-December 1976), member of the Political Affairs Subcommittee (December 1976-February 1977), and head of the Military Political Affairs Department (February 1977-)
8. Major Birhanu Baye: Chairman of the Legal Affairs Subcommittee (1974- July 1976), head of the Political and Foreign Relations Department (July - December 1976), head of the Legal

Affairs Department (December 1976-February 1977), and head of the Foreign Affairs Department (February 1977-);

9. Lt. Col. Teka Tulou: Chairman of the Intelligence Subcommittee (1974 - December 1976), sent for political training abroad (December 1976 - February 1977), and joint head of the Intelligence Subcommittee (February 1977-);
10. Major Kasahun Tafese: members of the Intelligence Subcommittee (1974 - February 1977), and joint head of the same Subcommittee (February 1977-);
11. Leading Technician Gesese Wolde-Kidan: member of the Economic Subcommittee (1974 - December 1976), and Chairman of the same Subcommittee (December 1976-);
12. Major Endale Tesema: member of the Social Affairs Subcommittee (1974 -);
13. Major Getachew Shibeshi: Chairman of the Confiscations Subcommittee (1974 - December 1976), sent for political training abroad (December 1976-April 1977), and head of the Derg's Security and Revolutionary Campaign Department (April 1977 -);
14. Lt. Gebeyehu Temesgen: Chairman of the Information and Public Relations Subcommittee (February 1977-);
15. Petty-officer Tamrat Ferede: member of the Social Affairs Subcommittee (1974 - February 1977), and Acting Chairman of the Information and Public Relations Subcommittee (February 1977 -);
16. Major Wubishet Dese: member of the Legal Affairs Subcommittee (1974 - July 1976), Chairman of the same Subcommittee (July - December 1976), sent abroad for political training (December 1976 - February 1977), and joint head of the Administration and Legal Affairs Subcommittee (February 1977 -).

## CONCLUSION

Haile Selassie was an absolute monarch who had supreme powers in the legislative, executive and judicial spheres of the government. He could initiate any Laws or veto those initiated by parliament or by the cabinet. He could, on petition from anyone or on his own initiative, make administrative decisions on any matter or veto decisions made by the executive branch including the cabinet. He had a judicial office (chilot) over which he presided and overturned decisions made by the courts of the land. He had a separate department under him (the Ministry of Pen) with the help of which he made his decisions known to the subordinate organs of government. These offices constituting the monarch's court were all based in the palace.

When the Derg overthrew the monarch in September 1974, it started exercising his powers collectively; by the time the year was out, the powers had devolved on the officers' junta within the Derg; and in February 1977, it had reverted back to an autocratic control. In this sense, the emergence of Mengistu as an absolute ruler can be seen as a continuation of Ethiopia's political culture. The resemblance is all the more striking when it is noted that individuals who did not belong to the royal dynasties or the aristocracy like Teodros and Yohannis had also become autocratic monarches and ruled the country without much legitimacy crisis.

Despite these similarities, however, there are differences between the old and new autocracies to justify the conclusion that a political transformation has taken place. The differences relate not so much to what had happened until February 1977 but to the developments afterwards. As will be discussed in the following chapters, Mengistu eliminated the political organizations that had been opposed to, or had not sided with him, purged their members from government and social institutions, formed under his personal direction a Leninist party and subordinated the government and social

institutions as well as the whole of society under the control of the party. It was this deliberate emulation of a foreign, 20th century, totalitarian political model that came to distinguish the new autocracy from the old.

#### FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

1. See Chapter 4 Section A1 above.
2. "Confusion and Democracy", Voice of Masses, No. 31, Nov 14th, 1976; and "EDU Strengthens Ties with the Afar People", Advocate, Vol. I, No. 2, August, 1976.
3. The EPRP and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front issued a joint communiqué in the summer of 1975 declaring that they had concluded an agreement concerning collaboration between themselves. The discussion in Chapter 4 section B concerning the training of EPRP guerillas by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front is further evidence of the existence of collaboration between the two organisations.
4. "The Position of EPRP on the Formation of Joint Front", Democracia, Special Issue, Vol. III, no date.
5. "The Speech of Mengistu Haile-Mariam Explaining the NDRPE", Addis Zemen, No. 988, April 21st, 1976.
6. See note 4 above.
7. "EDU Helps Defeat Peasant March", Advocate, Vol. I, No. 3, September, 1976.
8. "The adoption of a Policy intended to Solve the Eritrean Question Peacefully", Addis Zemen, No. 100, May 17th, 1976.
9. Lefort, René, "Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?", Zed Press, London, 1983, p. 170.
10. Concerning POMOA, see Chapter 4, Section C above.
11. Pliny the Middle Aged, "PMAC: Origins and Structure Part II", North East African Studies, Vol. 1 1979-80.
12. "A High Delegation Goes to the Soviet Union", Addis Zemen, No. 1052, July 6, 1976.
13. See note 1 above.
14. "Major Kiros Commits Suicide While in Prison", Addis Zemen, No. 1092, August 26, 1976.
15. See note 3 above.

16. John H. Spencer, Ethiopia at Bay: Personal Account of the Haile Selassie Years, Reference Publications Incorporated, Michigan 1983, p. 350.
17. See note 1 above at p. 180.
18. See note 8 above.
19. See note 3 above.
20. The Provisional Military Government, "Exposing the Anti-People Elements Who Swindle in Revolution", Addis Zemen, No. 1122, September 26, 1976.
21. The Provisional Military Government, "All Anti-People Elements Cry Like Cats Under the Shoes of the Oppressed", Addis Zemen, No. 1114, September 16, 1976.
22. "Short Roder, Long Roder", Revolutionary Ethiopia, Year 1, No. 10, September 25, 1976.
23. Melaku Tegen, "EPRP: Historical Background and Critical Assessment of its Experience", Second Annual Conference on the Horn of Africa, New School for Social Research, New York, May 29th-30, 1978.
24. "Red Terror in the Camp of the White Terror Perpetrators", Revolutionary Ethiopia, 2nd year, No. 42 1978.
25. "A People's revolution Would Not Be Reversed by the Death of One or Several Revolutionaries", Addis Zemen, No. 1122, September 26, 1976.
26. "Fikre Merid is Killed by Anarchists; the Criminals are Caught", Addis Zemen, No. 1127, October 3, 1976.
27. "Anti-Marxists Have Damaged the Political School with a Bomb; the Revolution will not be reversed at all because of the confusion caused by swindlers", Addis Zemen, No. 1148, October, 28, 1976.
28. See for example Pliny the Middle Aged at note 3 above.
29. See for example "Major Mengistu Explains that a Revolutionary Struggle is Expected of Teachers", Addis Zemen, No. 1123, Sept 29th, 1976; and "Being Adequately Armed", Revolutionary Ethiopia, Year 1, October 15th, 1976.

30. "Addis Ababa Kebele Leaders are to be Nominated Today", Addis Zemen, No. 1159, November 11, 1976.
31. Aster, "The Present Situation and the Role of the Kebeles", Revolutionary Ethiopia, Year 1, No. 13, November 9, 1976.
32. "Counter Terror", Revolutionary Ethiopia, Year 1, No. 14 November 24, 1976.
33. Article 2 of Proclamation 108/1976.
34. Article 8(1), (3), (4), (5), (7), (9) of Proclamation 108/1976.
35. Article 12(2), (4) of Proclamation 108/1976.
36. Article 13(2), (3), (4) and (5) of Proclamation 108/1976.
37. Article 10(1), (2) and (4) of Proclamation 108/1976.
38. Articles 8, 10, 12 and 13 or Proclamation 108/1976.
39. Articles 16(2) of Proclamation 108/1976.
40. See note 3 above.
41. Article 5(2) of Proclamation 108/1976.
42. Article 6(2) of Proclamation 108/1976.
43. Article 7(2) of Proclamation 108/1976.
44. Article 13(5) of Proclamation 108/1976.
45. "The Ethiopian People will be Victorious over their Humiliation", Addis Zemen, No. 1224, January 29, 1977.
46. "The Chairman's Speech at the Revolution Square", Addis Zemen, No.1225, January 31, 1977.
47. The Provisional Military Government, "The Broad Masses of Ethiopia: Your Revolution Has Been Transformed from a Defensive to an Offensive Position", Addis Zemen, No. 1229, February 4, 1977.
48. "Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu's Speech at the Revolution Square", Addis Zemen, No. 1229, February 4, 1977.

49. See for example René Lefort , Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?, Zed Press, London, 1983, at pp. 197-98.
50. "The Leaders of the Kebeles of Addis Ababa Condemn Counter Revolution; they appear before Lieut. Colonel Mengistu", Addis Zemen, No.1222, January 28, 1977.
51. "Proclamation Issued Concerning the Powers of the Derg and of the Council of Ministers", Addis Zemen, No. 1235, February 12, 1977.
52. "Lieut. Colonel Mengistu Becomes Chaiman of the Derg", Addis Zemen, No. 1235, February 12, 1977.
53. Article 8(3) of Proclamation 110/1977.
54. Article 8(9) of Proclamation 110/1977.
55. The introduction to Article 8 of Proclamation 110/1977.
56. Introduction and Sub-Article (11) of Article 7 of Proclamation 110/1977.
57. Article 5(10) of Proclamation 11/1977.
58. Though the Vice-Chairman and the General Secretary can convene a meeting of the Standing Committee according to Articles 10(1) and 11(1), this is so only in the absence of the Chairman and not when he is available but declines to call a meeting.
59. "The Responsibilities of the Derg Members In Government Departments and Provinces", Addis Zemen, No. 1199, Dec. 30, 1976.
60. c.f. Articles 5 and 6 of Proclamation 110/1977.
61. "The Provisional Military Government Confers Appointments", Addis Zemen, No. 1684, Aug 6, 1978.
62. "Pliny the Middle Aged, PMAC: Origins and Structure Part II", North East African Studies, Vol. I, No. I, 1979-80.
63. See note 17 above.
64. For a fuller explanation of POMOA and the Joint Front of Marxist-Leninist Organisations, see Chapter 4, Section C and Chapter 6, Section A, of this work respectively.

65. c.f. Article 7(3) of Proclamation 108/1976, Article 7(3) of Proclamation 110/1977 and Article 3 of Proclamation 119/1977.
66. Article 19 of Proclamation 110/1977.
67. Article 14(A) of Proclamation 110/1977.
68. Article 5(2) of Proclamation 110/1977.
69. c.f. Articles 7 and 8 of the same Proclamation.
70. "An Explanation From the Derg; Reactionaries are Thrown Overboard as the Class Struggle Intensifies", Addis Zemen, No. 1467, Nov 15, 1976.
71. Ibid.
72. Article 5(10) of Proclamation 110/1977.
73. Dawit Wolde Gioris, Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia, Red Sea Press 1989, p. 33.
74. Article 8(9) of Proclamation 110/1977.

### PART THREE

## CONSOLIDATION OF POWER (FEBRUARY 1977 - SEPTEMBER 1984)

### CHAPTER SEVEN

#### The Elimination of Internal and External Threats to Mengistu's Power;

##### (A) "Revolutionary Ethiopia of Death"

Like *most* dictators, Mengistu was not only head of the government but also head of state and as such personified the state. As of 1977, therefore, it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between the threats directed against him and those directed against the state. By and large it can perhaps be stated that whereas the internal opposition was a threat against Mengistu's position as a leader, the external invasion can be taken as a threat to both him as a leader and to the state.

When Mengistu assumed absolutist powers in February 1977, the government was engulfed by internal and external threats with the result that Ethiopia looked as though it was on the point of dismemberment. In the urban centres, Mengistu's coalition was locked into an assassination and counter-assassination match with the EPRP. In the north-west, EDU had captured the border towns of Metema and Setit-Humera and was poised to capture the provincial capital of Gondar. In the North, the Eritrean Liberation Force, the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front, EDU and the Tigrain Peoples' Liberation Front had brought chunks of the Eritrean and Tigrain countryside under their control and had besieged the major towns in those provinces. In the east, the Afar Liberation Front had been destroying military convoys and garrisons and periodically cutting the road leading to

the only port of Aseb which was still under government control. In the south and south-east, the Western Somalia Liberation Front and the Somali Abdo had stepped up guerilla activists and were attacking military garrisons and police stations, killing highland settlers in the region and cutting the country's only rail link with the sea, the railway that linked the capital city with Djiboutti. The road linking the Eritrean capital (Asmara) to the remaining Ethiopian port of Massawa having come under the threat of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, the country had in effect become land-locked.

These developments brought Ethiopia into conflict with the neighbouring conservative states, notably Sudan and Saudi-Arabia, which were openly supporting such conservative Muslim as well as Christian insurgents in Ethiopia as the Eritrean Liberation Forces, the Afar Liberation Front and EDU.<sup>1</sup> To add to its liturgy of problems, the government learnt, from its intelligence department, that its eastern neighbour (the Republic of Somalia) was not only promoting the insurgents of the Western Somalia Liberation Front and the Somali Abdo but was itself preparing to invade Ethiopia with a view to annexing the Ogaden region which had been under Ethiopian control since the turn of the century.<sup>2</sup>

Mengistu took a war-like stance against these threats in the aftermath of the coup on February 3, 1977. A communiqué issued in the name of the Derg on the following day pointed out that Ethiopian progressives (members of Mengistu's coalition) had been unable to take action against the counter-revolutionaries because of the dominance of the reactionaries and their supporters in the Derg; it then stated that the revolution's strategy would, from that day, be transformed from the defensive into the offensive<sup>3</sup>. In his address to a rally held on the same day, Mengistu condemned Teferi and his faction, EPRP, EDU, the Eritrean Liberation Forces, the conservative states of the region and imperialism as

enemies of the Ethiopian revolution.<sup>4</sup> In his address at another rally on April 12, Mengistu again condemned the same forces and asked the Ethiopian people to rally around the banner of 'Call of the Motherland' and fight the enemies of the revolution<sup>5</sup>. On April 17, he made a similar speech and smashed three bottles filled with blood (or something resembling it) to signify imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic-capitalism under which all the enumerated enemies of the revolution were supposed to be subsumed<sup>6</sup>. Revolutionary Ethiopia (the publication of POMOA) put the same on a more theoretical plane: the main contradiction of the time was not between Ethiopia and external aggression (as Teferi's group would have it); nor between the national progressive and reactionary forces (as others would have it); but between external and internal reactionaries, on one hand, and internal progressives, on the other, (as Moa would have it).<sup>7</sup> Based on such rhetorical justifications, Mengistu, who now had brought all the resources of coercion under his control, declared war on all fronts and by the end of early 1978 had subdued all the internal opposition (and repelled external aggression) with the notable exception of the Eritrean and Tigrain separatist insurgents.

#### **(B) The Elimination of EDU**

In July 1976 Persident El Numeri of Sudan accused Ethiopia of involvement in a coup against him and subsequently provided open support to EDU and Eritrean insurgents in contravention of the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement in which the two states had committed themselves to bringing about peace by closing their frontiers to each others' insurgents. In December 1976, EDU, supported by Sudanese tanks and artillery, launched an offensive in the north-western and northern provinces of Gondar and Tigrai. On January 13, 1977, the border towns of Metema and Setit-Humera, in the province of

Gondar, fell; from then on, EDU was poised to capture the provincial capital of Gondar and the region between the border and the capital town. By the spring, the soldiers in the area had abandoned their garrisons and joined EDU. The wing which, with the assistance of the Eritrean Liberation Forces, had gone on the offensive in Tigray did not enjoy as much success as the one which had gone into Gondar; it had to compete with two other movements which were active in the region, namely, EPRP and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, and the territory was far removed from the Sudan where EDU had its basis.<sup>8</sup> The movement's operations in other regions like Wolo and Shoa were even less spectacular than in the first two provinces.

Despite the threat that was hovering in the south and southeast, Mengistu's government withdrew some of the brigades from there and sent them north to fight the EDU. As will be noted below, Ethio-Soviet relations had taken a dramatic turn for the better in the aftermath of Mengistu's February coup with the result that a sizable number of tanks and armed personnel carriers were delivered to Ethiopia in March and April. These weapons were also deployed to the EDU fronts as of delivery. Thus was launched the government's counter-offensive in the spring of 1977; while attacking Sudanese involvement in Ethiopian affairs ferociously, the mass media began to report successful operations against EDU forces almost everyday. Before the summer was out, EDU forces had been driven out of Ethiopia and back into their Sudanese sanctuary. Though they were able to regroup and launch further offensives starting from the autumn<sup>9</sup>, EDU forces have never since been able to achieve as credible a success in the battle field as they had done in the first half of 1977.

### **(C) The Red Terror (the Elimination of EPRP)**

The threats posed by EDU, the separatist insurgents and the Republic of Somalia were cases for the army, of

which Mengistu had become commander-in-chief soon after his February coup; as such, he was finally in charge of the military operations against those forces. The case of EPRP which had engaged Mengistu's coalition in an urban armed struggle, on the other hand, required a different strategy: as noted earlier, for some time by this stage, Mengistu's coalition had been advocating 'the arming of the broad masses' and the declaration of 'revolutionary action' and 'the red terror' against what it called 'the white terror' of EPRP. The February 4 declaration that the revolution had been transformed from a defensive to an offensive position as of then meant, inter alia, the endorsement of these strategies against EPRP - strategies which were vigorously pursued by the government in the wake of Mengistu's coup d'état.

The peasant associations which came into existence in early 1975 were in December of the same year authorised to establish an additional organ (peasant defence squads) to be recruited from among 'the broad masses of peasants'. The urban dwellers' associations, equivalents of peasant defence squads - 'the revolution defence squads' - which were supposed to be composed of 'the broad masses of urban dwellers', were not established until late 1976. 'Revolution defence squads' were also established among workers of the various industries at about the same time as the urban dwellers defence squads. All these types of squads were charged with the task of carrying out the duties of the police force at the local level; however, the role they played in political developments became more important than the role they played in fighting non-political crimes. The squads of the peasants' association had been envisaged as weapons in the struggle against the landed gentry whose land had been expropriated; later, however, they came in handy for the struggle against EPRP. The squads of the urban dwellers' associations and factory workers had been launched directly against the EPRP from the start. In the aftermath of Mengistu's coup these squads were one of

the sections of 'the broad masses' that were armed to carry out the 'red terror' against the 'white terror' of EPRP.

Similarly armed against EPRP were the cadres of the political organisations that came under the orbit of Mengistu's coalition. After the establishment of POMOA in April 1976, the bulk of the cadres were subordinated to its branch offices which existed at the provincial, awaraja and district levels. As explained previously, POMOA was brought under the direct control of the Standing Committee of the Derg in December 1976, an administrative link which Mengistu retained after his February 1977 coup. Given the subservience of the Standing Committee, this meant that POMOA came under the direct control of Mengistu; the cadres and the defence squads, which were subordinated to POMOA for political guidance, were also finally accountable to Mengistu.

Further, there were the cadres which were drawn from the army primarily by the Workers League and Revolutionary Flame. It is not clear whether these cadres were controlled by POMOA at all. It appears that some among them who were assigned by the two organisations to POMOA to discharge the latter's functions were probably controlled by it to some extent; it appears that the remaining received their orders from Mengistu and his henchman Sergeant Legese Asfaw who was head of the Derg's Military Political Affairs Department. This was certainly the case with what were called 'the military cadres'. As soldiers, all these types of cadres would have been armed and skilled in the use of fire arms; in fact, they played a key role in the struggle against EPRP by leading assassination as well as search and seizure teams made up of the civilian cadres and the revolution defence squads.

Yet another resource for coercion was the highly trained and pampered military force which came under the Derg's Security Department headed previously by the fearsome Daniel Asfaw and after his death in the February

coup by Major Getachew Shibeshi. This force became in charge of the palace's security instead of the old Body Guard of the king and later its role was expanded to include the security of the capital city and most of the province of Shoa. More relevant was the fact that it became the ground for recruiting and training what looked like Mengistu's private armies which operated from the palace and haunted the cities by night. They were certainly the most ruthless and horrifying of the assassins of Mengistu's government used to eliminate chosen prominent individuals<sup>10</sup>, and to act as a back-up force for the revolution defence squads and cadres.

As explained in the previous section a new task incorporated in Proclamation 110 of 1977 and entrusted to the chairman of the Derg was that of 'taking measures against anti-people and counter-revolutionary elements'. Obviously, the means by which this task was to be discharged by the chairman (Mengistu) was the above described machinery of death. At the disposal of Mengistu were the following: the newly created people's militia which was under the Vice-chairman of the Derg (Atnafu Abate) until his execution in November 1977 after which it came under the chairman directly; the police force; the greatly expanded intelligence department which came under the Derg's intelligence department headed by Teka Tulou; and the biggest army in Black Africa of which the chairman was the commander-in-chief after his coup in February 1977.

The task of arming the revolution defence squads and possibly the civilian and military cadres was entrusted to Sergeant Legese Asfaw. In the meantime, a drive to disarm the civilian population was put into action. In traditional Ethiopia, the possession of weapons and the traffic in them was hardly regulated at all with the result that an estimated number of 9,000,000 pistols and rifles were kept in civilian hands; of these, 300,000 were kept by Addis Ababans alone<sup>11</sup>. Armed squads composed of soldiers, policemen, cadres and members of

urban dwellers' associations and revolution defence squads conducted house to house searches in the capital city from March 23 to 27 and from May 7 to 9. It was reported that during the first round of search and seizure, EPRP weapons, cars, and field-glasses were captured but only partially<sup>12</sup>. These armed squads were licensed to take revolutionary measures against suspected EPRP members and sympathisers; however, there are many reports that this power was used by them against innocent civilians for personal gain and for settling old scores. Similar rounds of search and seizure and the excesses that accompanied them were repeated in the urban centres up and down the country and even in some rural areas.

It has previously been noted that assassinations between EPRP and Mengistu's coalition had been played out in the streets and back yards of Addis Ababa since September 1976. The assassinations became more ferocious in the wake of Mengistu's coup and leaders of trade unions, urban dwellers associations and student bodies started to be gunned down everyday by EPRP sharp-shooters in March and April<sup>13</sup>. In the meantime, EPRP and POMOA cadres were butchering each other in the provincial towns. The government's initiative of the time, nevertheless, had become less selective in its targets; on the contrary, it had made a definite choice to go for mass executions and for breaking the backbone of EPRP. This policy was reflected clearly in the mass executions of May.

Since 1974, May Day had become an occasion for the flexing of muscles of contending groups; they brought out as many of their supporters as possible to the rallies and made them shout their slogans and hoist their placards. The May Day rallies of 1975 and 1976 had resulted in the arrest of many and in the death of some EPRP supporters; the rallies of 1977 in Addis Ababa, on the other hand, led to the most horrifying carnage in the history of the country. An anti-government demonstration organised by EPRP to undermine the government's May Day

rallies was launched on the evening of April 29; well over 500 of the demonstrators were gunned down during the same evening while marching, running for cover or in the houses they had fled to for refuge. The massacre continued in the following days; according to the Secretary General of the Swedish Save the Children Fund, over 1000 youths had been executed by May 16 and their bodies were left in the street and ravaged by hyenas in the night. School children of 11 years of age and above were at the forefront of EPRP demonstrations. It is widely reported that hospitals often refused to treat the wounded on the grounds that they were reactionaries<sup>14</sup>, and charged anything up to 100 US Dollars and 25 US Dollars for the release of students' and workers' bodies, respectively, to cover the cost of bullets wasted in killing them.

What was done to those who were detained under suspicion of being members or sympathizers of EPRP was no less horrifying than the street massacres. The number of detainees was too great to be accommodated by the existing prisons and police stations; as a result, all the offices of the urban dwellers' associations, the palaces and military garrisons in the towns up and down the country were turned into detention centres. The victims of the mass arrests and those picked up in the streets and their homes were taken to these centres and subjected to some of the most inhuman forms of torture of a cruelty unprecedented in the history of the country. One typical form of torture was soaking the feet of the detainees in boiling water for a time and then suspending them up-side-down and beating the soles of their feet until the skins gave way to blood and the raw flesh and finally to the bare bones. Without doubt, many died during the ordeal, others many years later as a result of complications they developed afterwards, yet others became crippled for life, and the remaining became paranoid, unable to trust anyone. It is only the exception from among the generation aged between 15 to

about 40 at that time who have not gone through imprisonment and some kind of torture.

One of the purposes of the exercise was to force the detainees to come up with the names of three EPRP members; it appears that an individual was allowed to know only three fellow EPRP members with whom he was to work. Other crude ways of establishing affiliation to EPRP included the publishing and broadcasting of government telephone numbers to which individuals could call anonymously and accuse others of belonging to EPRP; and the holding of mass meetings in which those present would be pressurised into self-incriminations and mutual accusations. Needless to say, these methods were open to abuse; EPRP members victimised members of Mengistu's coalition deliberately exposing them as belonging to their own organisation; others victimised their enemies for similar considerations; and yet others did so because of the torture. It is obvious that many innocent individuals were victimised in this manner; though terror is a negation of due process of law, it nevertheless was meant to achieve a goal through the generation of fear.

Thus screened, the presumed members of EPRP were herded into trucks, taken to various parts of the cities very early in the morning and executed with a volley of shots, their cries and wails being overheard by the residents of the locality. Then, their skulls smashed open with gun butts, their brains and blood scattered all around and slogans pinned to their bodies, the corpses would be left lying in strategic street corners till morning for passersby to see; sometimes, corpses were also displayed on television. With this morbid ritual over, the bodies were then collected and buried in some mass graves in the outskirts of the cities. Judging by the public display of the 'red' terror, it was obviously intended to force the urban populations into submission and into exposing EPRP members. Both EPRP and Mengistu's coalition were proud of the fact they were in the

business of perpetrating terror against each other; however, they both claimed their own form of terror was 'red' and that of the other side was 'white'<sup>16</sup>.

EPRP's back-bone was not broken by the terror of the first half of 1977 but it was beginning to crack under the weight. In fact, even when EPRP adopted its policy of urban armed struggle in the summer of 1976, there had been some among the members who had been opposed to the idea and who had apparently gone as far as betraying some of their comrades to the government. Further, the fact that the policy resulted in the slaughter of so many children alienated other members of the organisation; this is often cited as one of the reasons why EPRP's presumed leader<sup>17</sup> (Birihane Meskel Reda) led a break-away faction in the summer of 1977. The circumstances of his arrest by the government are not clear; however, he finally ended in prison where he was made to write a long report/confession of a few hundred pages about the EPRP and was then executed. Further, the government had been able to piece together all the information that it extracted out of the mass of detainees through its torture.

Then the government launched its second round of 'the red terror' in November 1977, directed this time not only against EPRP but also against AESM which had fallen out with the government several months earlier. The excesses of the second round of terror were as horrific as the first; again, mass arrests and executions particularly of the youth were to haunt the cities. Nevertheless, one of the differences between the two rounds of terror was the fact that, by the end of 1977, the Government had accumulated better information about the leaders and structure of EPRP and was, therefore, more systematic in its prosecution of the second round of terror. In March 1978, it declared that EPRP had been wiped out completely.

What was left of EPRP after that were its rural bases in Tigrai and Gondar provinces. The armed wing of

EPRP (the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army) was not much of a fighting force; it had as a result lost its credibility among the peasants who lived near the bases. To make matters worse, EPRP's most important base which was situated in Tigrai (Assimba) was attacked and destroyed by the Tigre People's Liberation Front in May 1978. It is said that the reasons for this was the fact that the Front wanted EPRP out of its territorial preserve of Tigrai; it appears, nonetheless, that there were some other underlying frictions between the two organisations as well as differences they both had with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front. EPRP seems to have incurred the disfavour of its patron (the Eritrean People's Liberation Front) by calling itself a 'party' and by referring to the Front as one of its mass organisations.

Be that as it may, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army in Assimba had no choice but to flee into Eritrea and into the hands of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front which accompanied members of the Army to the EPRP bases in Gondar. There, several plenary meetings were held in the subsequent years in order to examine the failure of the urban armed struggle and to come up with alternative strategies for the future. However, the meetings only led to recriminations particularly between the leaders and the rank and file; the former were accused of having been dictatorial, of misleading the rank and file about the progress of the urban armed struggle, and of generally leading the organisation into disaster<sup>18</sup>. With the exception of a relatively insignificant guerrilla unit which continued to operate from one of its Gondar bases (Chilga) and another which continued to operate in the Northern part of the same province under the Tigre People's Liberation Front (the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement), EPRP cannot be said to have survived the government's onslaught of 1977 and early 1978.

#### (D) The Repulsion of Somalia's Aggression

##### 'Everything to the War Front'

The threat posed to Mengistu's powers, as well as to the integrity of the country, by the Western Somali Liberation Front and the Somali Abdo insurgents, and the invasion of Ethiopia by their supporter (the Republic of Somalia) were much more dangerous than the threats posed by EDU and EPRP. Obviously, these internal and external threats, coupled with his policy of using force and violence to subdue internal opposition and repel external aggression, made him extremely dependent on military aid from foreign powers. He was able to surmount the threats, especially that posed by Somalia's coalition, by abandoning Ethiopia's traditional allies (the western powers, particularly the US) and by forging closer ties with the socialist countries, notably the Soviet Union, which provided him with massive amounts of the required weapons.

Despite the Derg's pro-socialist rhetoric in the early years of its existence and despite the training of hundreds of cadres in the socialist countries during the same period, no real progress was made in the strengthening of relations with communist states until after the adoption of Scientific Socialism in April 1976 and, particularly, until after Mengistu's seizure of power in February 1977. As noted previously, an important delegation, led by Captain Moges Wolde-Michael, was dispatched to Moscow in early July 1976 to explain the adoption by the Derg of Scientific Socialism and to seek economic and military assistance<sup>19</sup>. One of the spin-offs of this visit appears to have been a secret Ethio-Soviet arms deal in December 1976 in accordance with which some 130 tanks and armed personnel carriers were delivered in March and April 1977, i.e. after Mengistu's seizure of power. The weapons were

immediately deployed to the northern fronts to be used mostly against EDU.<sup>20</sup>

Mengistu's portrayal as the most left-wing politician of the Derg members (drawn by the adherents of his coalition especially by AESM) had promoted his stature not only among the supporters of the coalition but also among the diplomats from the socialist countries. This, coupled with his radical posturing on all matters considered by the Derg and the moderate position of those that fell by the wayside, appears to have led the socialist countries to conclude that he was their man. They were the first to congratulate him on his coup against Teferi and his group on February 3, 1977; when national journalists arrived on the scene, the Soviet ambassador was already there, leading them to speculate later that he may well have been present at the time of the shoot-out. From then on, there is no doubt that diplomats from the socialist countries had direct access to Mengistu's office and that they were helping him adopt decisions on certain important international and other questions, unbeknown to the Department of Foreign Affairs.

In the meantime Ethiopia's relations with its traditional supplier of arms (the US) were deteriorating. Earlier, William Schauffle (Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs under President Ford's administration), had told Congress that the US should continue its support for Ethiopia at her time of difficulty, particularly because such a policy would contribute to the stability of that second most populous African state; because it would assist black African states in maintaining their territorial integrity; because it would save the US from criticism by its friends in Africa and elsewhere; and because the US should not be seen to be distancing itself from Ethiopia's brand of socialism.<sup>21</sup> Further, in the summer of 1976, Ethiopia had received its last delivery of F5E's from the US. Despite these positive overtures, the

Derg's anti-US rhetoric continued to be increasingly hostile; its human rights record was getting worse; and its measures against pro-west individuals steadily more violent. In the first four months of 1977, the relations between the two states rock-bottomed.

In January, Mr. Carter became the President of the US with his human rights offensive and his idea of cultivating friendly relations with Third World radical states. Apparently, within a few weeks of taking office, he was reading voluminous studies on the Horn of Africa in the hope of challenging the Soviet Union's initiative in the region and thus leaving his personal mark on the events of the area<sup>22</sup>. However, Mr. Carter was to preside over the worst period of US-Ethiopian relations.

On 26 February, Washington announced that Ethiopia, along with Uruguay and Argentina, would receive reduced aid from the US because of human-rights violations. On the same day, T. Seelye (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs) was explaining to Ethiopian officials in Addis Ababa that no funds would be made available for the supply of military equipment on a grant basis after the end of the 1977 US fiscal year, and that the US was willing to improve relations only if the Ethiopian government respected the human rights of its citizens and if it restrained public condemnation of the US. Apparently, President Ford's budget proposal prepared in his last days of office had made no provision for grant military assistance to Ethiopia for the following fiscal year. Soon after T. Seelye's visit the US Embassy notified the Ethiopian government that the US was ready to begin negotiations concerning the closure of its communications facilities in Kagnaw, Eritrea, scheduled for September 30, 1977. The Kagnaw installation had been rendered obsolete by advances in satellite technology and the US had begun phasing it out in 1971 so much so, that by 1974 the personnel there had been reduced from 2000 to a few dozen<sup>23</sup>.

Mengistu's response was swift and dramatic. Between 23 and 30 April, he ordered the closure of the Kagnev communications facilities, the US consulate in Asmara (Eritrea), the US Information Service offices, the US medical research centre (NAMRU), and expelled, with 48 hours notice, three western journalists, and terminated the 1953 Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement between the two countries. If Mengistu had been unduly violent towards Ethiopian citizens and hostile in his rhetoric towards the US, the Carter administration had mistimed its public censure of Mengistu's government. Mengistu had just begun savouring the pomp and circumstance as a leader of a country rubbing shoulders with world statesmen; under the circumstances, it is more likely than not that the US act of depriving him of weapons at a time when his country most needed them would have been taken as a disapproval of his ascent to power.

Legally, the power to decide on international questions like the one under consideration was entrusted to the Congress, the Central Committee and the Standing Committee of the Derg<sup>24</sup>, the chairman's powers being limited to 'granting audience to foreign guests and diplomats' and to 'supervising the implementation of international agreements'<sup>25</sup>. As argued earlier, the first two of these Derg organs could not have been involved in the decision to downgrade relations with the US, as they had been dispersed after February 1977 and as they at any rate did not hold any meetings in March and April of that year. Further, for reasons already explained, the involvement of the Standing Committee could only have been limited to being informed, if at all, of a decision already adopted and acted upon.

In fact, according to the then Minister of Foreign Affairs (Dawit Wolde-Giyorgis), Mengistu told the officials of that Ministry to leave the matter to him and personally decided to downgrade Ethio-American relations. No doubt, before making the decision, he would have consulted certain individuals like Birihanu Baye (head of

the Derg's Foreign Affairs Department), Lij Michael Imiru (political adviser of the chairman) and whoever else he chose to confide in. Perhaps more important than these would have been the diplomat from the socialist countries (particularly the Soviet and Cuban ambassadors) who, after February, were conferring with Mengistu privately every other day and for hours at a stretch<sup>26</sup>. It is pretty unlikely that Mengistu would have risked offending the US without a promise or guarantee, during those encounters with the diplomats, of an alternative source of weapons. After having downgraded Ethio-American relations at the end of April, Mengistu went to Moscow in the early part of the next month and concluded agreements on friendly relations and on economic, social and cultural cooperation, in addition to securing an arms pledge estimated to have been worth between 350 and 450 million dollars<sup>27</sup>.

The final shift of alliances was determined by the conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia. The bone of contention between chairman Mengistu and President Siad Bare of Somalia was the territory of the Ogaden, which the latter claimed on the basis that it was inhabited by people ethnically the same as those in the Republic of Somalia, and which the former claimed on the basis that the territory had been under Ethiopian control since the turn of the 20th century. On 14 and 15 April, 1977, Fidel Castro went to Addis Ababa and discussed with Mengistu the possibility of creating a confederation made up of Ethiopia, the Republics of Somalia and South Yemen, in the hope of thwarting the impending crisis over the question of the Ogaden. In subsequent meetings held between Mengistu and Bare in Aden (South Yemen) and between officials of the two countries in Moscow, East Berlin and Havana, Ethiopia is reported to have expressed interest in the proposal while Somalia rejected it out of hand. In July, Moscow came up with an alternative proposal; an Ethiopian delegation in Moscow was asked to consider ceding the territory of the Ogaden to the

Republic of Somalia since the unification of all Somali people was a fundamental tenet of the state of the Somali Republic<sup>28</sup>. Mengistu rejected the proposal on the ground that the dispute between the two countries related to border and not territorial questions. He was as intransigent on the alternative suggestion as Bare on the proposal of confederation<sup>29</sup>

In the middle of May (ie immediately after Mengistu's visit to the Soviet Union), Bare denounced Moscow's involvement in Ethiopia and warned that, if it was not stopped, relations between the two countries would suffer. Subsequently, his ambition to acquire the territory of the Ogaden was fuelled by Ethiopia's internal divisions and weakness and by his conviction that the conservative states of the Middle East and the West would provide him with the weapons he would require to wage war, in exchange for his shift of alliance from the East to the West. US, British and French promises made in mid-July to provide him with defensive weapons were withdrawn soon afterwards, apparently when it was realised that he had sent his regular forces to fight in Ethiopia<sup>30</sup>. This left Bare to the generosity of his benefactors in the Middle east, who in any case were not allowed by the US to transfer weapons to him, and to the wrath of the socialist countries and of Ethiopia.

While the full-scale war that broke out between the two countries was claimed by Ethiopia to have been launched on July 23, Somalia insisted that it was being fought between Ethiopian forces, on the one hand, and the forces of the Western Somalia Liberation Front and the Somali Abdo, on the other. The fact was, nonetheless, that within two months the regular forces of the Republic of Somalia had penetrated some 700 kilometres deep into Ethiopian territory and were on the point of capturing the provincial capital of Harar and the neighbouring air-force base town of Dire-Dawa. The Ethiopian army was no match for that of Somalia: it was divided between supporters of one political group or another; some of

its units were refusing to fight on the ideological grounds that two oppressed peoples should not wage war on each other; it was badly armed; and it was extremely stretched, fighting as it was on many fronts. The humiliation led to an upsurge of Ethiopian nationalism among citizens especially those not committed to the political groups. Mengistu, who since May had been raising a militia hundreds of thousands strong and mobilizing the population into raising money, preparing food and providing logistical support to the army and militia at the war front, rose to the occasion and, with the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church on his side, started addressing rallies and championing the cause of nationalism under highly emotive banners like 'call of the motherland' and 'everything to the war front',<sup>31</sup> By contrast, sections of the civilian left were, at the time, prevaricating about the impropriety or otherwise of two oppressed peoples fighting one another; they insisted that the war was not between the masses of the two states but between their leaders.

The war made the arms race between Mengistu and Bare much fiercer than ever before. Feeling betrayed by the West because of its withdrawal of the promised military assistance, Bare went to Moscow in July to try to patch up relations; however, he was cold-shouldered and returned disappointed; from then on, his rhetoric became increasingly hostile towards Moscow. Similarly, Mengistu made a timid effort to make it up to the US; in the middle of September, he called in the US Chargé d'Affairs and asked for spare parts for the F5E's delivered a year earlier and for weapons; needless to say, the US response was negative. Mengistu's positive overtures to the US were the result of his disappointment with the Soviet Union's procrastinations regarding the delivery of weapons promised during his May visit to Moscow. On September 18, he gave a press conference in which he condemned the socialist countries for continuing to arm

Somalia which he said was tantamount to complicity with 'the reactionary regime of Bare'.

Unable to effect a cease-fire either through direct mediation or indirectly through other socialist countries, African states and the OAU, and being on the verge of losing the friendship of both Ethiopia and Somalia, the Soviet Union finally made its choice. It started delivering weapons to Ethiopia as of the end of September; and on October 19 the Soviet ambassador to Ethiopia issued a statement announcing the formal cessation of arms deliveries to Somalia. This was the final straw; a wave of outrage swept across Somalia; on November 13, Bare did to the Soviet Union and Cuba what Mengistu had done to the US during the previous April, only in a more dramatic and humiliating fashion. He severed diplomatic relations with both countries, expelled all their military personnel, and closed down Soviet naval and airplane facilities in Somalia. Western journalists were invited to witness the unruly and humiliating manner in which the expulsions were carried out<sup>32</sup>.

These developments finally opened the way for closer relations between Ethiopia and the socialist countries. Starting from the middle of December, the Soviet arsenal was wide open and massive quantities of weapons began to be air-lifted to Ethiopia. Also, thousands of Cuban and hundreds of South Yemeni troops began to arrive, no doubt because they were more familiar with Soviet weapons and also because they were better trained than their Ethiopian counterparts. Senior Soviet officers who had been expelled from the Republic of Somalia planned the counter-offensive which was finally launched in the middle of February 1978. Within weeks, the invading troops were in disarray; those who survived the joint onslaught of the Ethiopian army and of the Ethiopian superior air-force, Cuban and South Yemeni troops, fled across the arid region of the Ogaden back to Somalia. On March 19, Bare announced that his troops had withdrawn

from Ethiopia. The West's preoccupation as of then became the question of whether the victorious forces would invade Somalia and keep it under the orbit of Soviet influence.

Bare's military adventures cost him the friendship of the socialist countries (which had been carefully nurtured since he took power in 1969) without necessarily winning him the friendship of the West and without securing the long-sought -after territory of the Ogaden. To Mengistu, on the other hand, it created an occasion to win the friendship of the socialist countries, to rub shoulders with world statesmen like Castro, Honecker and Breshnev, and to be seen as the man who delivered his country from the humiliation of external aggression. No doubt, all this amounted to a tremendous boost to his prestige and to his claim to power; in addition it gave him access to massive resources of coercion with which he was to impose his will upon his own country.

In justification of Mengistu's executions of fellow Derg members and his seizure of power, Raul Valdes Vivo (the then head of the Foreign Relations Department of the Cuban Communist Party Central Committee) asserted, in a book he wrote at the time, that there was documentary evidence to show that Teferi Bante was working with the CIA to overthrow the Derg and that Aman was counter-revolutionary and that they were both rightly eliminated<sup>33</sup>. He goes on to add that Mengistu sided with the oppressed people of Ethiopia because he had suffered racism in the US when he was there for training and because he knew of the Vietnam revolution, the black movement, and of the student movement<sup>34</sup>. Judging by Mengistu's subsequent behaviour, it appears that all this 'eulogy' coupled with the welcoming embrace he received from the socialist countries had gone to his head by 1978. However, it was not so much his prior commitment to any ideology, as suggested by Valdes Vivo, that cemented the relations between Ethiopia and the socialist countries. It was rather, his readiness to echo the

rhetoric of the civilian left and act on it for reasons of personal aggrandisement, the willingness of the socialist countries to embrace him despite his comparatively inferior academic and professional credentials, Ethiopia's strategic significance in the region, the size of its population (the second biggest in black Africa), and the presence in Addis Ababa of the headquarters of a number of international organisations.

### **Conclusion**

The Ethiopian politics of the first four years after 1974 were characterised by an excessive use of force and violence. Almost the first to fall prey to it were the senior military officers of the ancien regime. According to Rene Lefort, for example, out of the sixty or so generals of Haile Selassie's government, only five remained on the active list quite early on. Also by 1978 out of the first graduates from the Harar Military Academy ( who were junior officers) only three remained on the active list<sup>35</sup>; by all accounts, graduates of the academically inferior Holeta Military Academy (which Mengistu attended ) appear to have survived the violence of the time better. The rest were purged, exiled or deliberately placed at the war front to be used as fodder to enemy fire-power. Similarly victimised were the high dignitaries of the ancien regime and the country-gentry especially those who resisted the Derg's nationalisation of rural land and those who put up resistance to Derg rule on account of their loyalty to Haile Selassie's government or its local officials.

Nevertheless, the use of force and violence was not limited to the above whom the civilian left would have referred to as 'the reactionary classes' but also raised its ugly head with much more gruesome morbidity against the advocates of change and violence themselves. For about a year and a half, starting from September 1976, adherents of EPRP were made victims of mass arrests, tortures and executions primarily in the urban centres of

the country. The number of those killed on both sides is estimated to be as many as thirty-two thousand<sup>36</sup>. Also, as will be explained in the following chapter, adherents of the other leftist organisations which had rallied behind Mengistu in his struggle against the other prominent members of the Derg and against EPRP were similarly detained, tortured and mercilessly eliminated between the summers of 1977 and 1979.

Needless to say, force and violence are doubled-edged weapons; in fact, the number of those killed while fighting to prop up the Derg and to defend the integrity of the country far exceeds the number lost by the opposition especially when those who fell while fighting the secessionist insurgents is taken into consideration. According to one reliable estimate, the Ethiopian army lost 90,000 soldiers between 1975 and 1983 on the Eritrean front alone. The number of Eritrean insurgents lost during the same period is estimated to be 9000<sup>37</sup>.

Obviously, the maintenance of the Derg's power was predicated on the use of force and violence more than anything else. Since its inception, its radicalism in this as well as other questions was fuelled by some among it (notably Mengistu) whose initial courtship with Marxism-Leninism and with the violence it endorses was propelled by the ambition to be seen as having unravelled the mysteries of a communist revolution and by the desire to out-shine fellow Derg members. The civilian left had made the communist revolution the only popular course of action that the country could pursue. Some writers have in fact tended to go further than this and hold that Mengistu was personally responsible for all the major decisions and excesses of the government, in that he executed them behind the back of the Derg.<sup>38</sup> This fails to give due regard to the demand for the measures from sections of the civilian left.

However, the suggestion that Mengistu had always been at the centre of the Derg's major decisions is not

without its justifications. He became the first vice-chairman of the Derg from its inception probably because of his widely acknowledged qualities as a leader. By all accounts, he was in the early stages humility incarnate in private dealings and committee meetings during which he preferred to err on the side of listening rather than expressing his views; in assemblies, he was a compelling demagogue who roused emotion by appealing to nationalist-populist sentiments and grand ideals; he was untrusting, quick to avenge himself and to reward loyalty; and he had a great feel for publicity.

No less important to his prominence in the Derg was his popularity with NCO's and privates. He himself started his military career as a boy-scout in the army and from then on he inched his way up the ladder to become a private soldier when he became of age, an NCO, a second lieutenant in 1959 and a major by 1974. Whatever he may have lacked by way of academic education - the Holeta Military Academy which he attended offered no academic subjects whatever - he appears to have more than compensated for by his touch for the sentiments and aspirations of NCO's and soldiers. It was people like Sergeant Legese Asfaw (a Derg member from the Third Division like Mengistu himself) who mobilised such low-ranking fellow-Derg members and had Mengistu elected to the first vice-chairmanship of that body in June 1974. Further, the active sections of the NCO's and privates in the army at large, with whom Mengistu was popular, constituted his most important power base in the country; and from early on, they held the army firmly behind him and provided him with an access to the main resource of coercion. There were others in the Derg who had a similar career to that of Mengistu; however, they did not necessarily have Mengistu's other qualities such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph.

As the Derg's first vice-chairman, he was head of certain key positions which made him tower over the other members. He was head of the Derg's secretariat and as

such had influence on, and easy access to, information about the activities of the Derg and the implementation of its decisions. Also, he was head of over-all political matters and as such was at the centre of all political policy-making decisions of the Derg. As noted earlier, it was this position that enabled him to exploit the differences among the civilian left and bring one wing of it under the orbit of his influence.

More relevant was the fact that Mengistu was head of over-all security matters. This meant that in the early months of the Derg's existence, he chaired what was called the Planning and Operations Subcommittee of the Derg which, with the help of the unit committees discussed earlier, was responsible for arresting the dignitaries of the ancien regime which took place in the summer of 1974<sup>39</sup>. In the subsequent reorganisations of the Derg, the Planning and Operations Subcommittee appears to have been rechristened as the 'Derg's Security Subcommittee' and made in charge of a highly trained core of soldiers, NCO's and officers which took over the functions of the old Body Guard of the king after it was disbanded towards the end of 1974. It is difficult to determine the size of the force that comes under the Derg's Security Subcommittee; however, the fact that the Body Guard was one of the four divisions of the Ethiopian army and the fact that after a few years of the Derg's existence the force under the Derg's Security Subcommittee took charge of the security of the capital city and most of the Shoan Province suggests that it was sizable. No doubt, like the other subcommittees, the Derg's Security Subcommittee was replaced by one-man management.

Lt. Col. Daniel Asfaw, a contemporary of Mengistu's at the Holeta Military Academy, was a member of the Planning and Operations Subcommittee and later became head of the Derg's Security Department until February 3 1977 when he was gunned down in the palace coup, after which he was replaced by Major Getachew Shibeshi. It

appears that Mengistu, in collusion with Daniel Asfaw, had been using the force under the Derg's Security Department as a private army and harassing and executing those who threatened his position; it was Daniel Asfaw and his subordinates who arrested and executed Aman, Sisay, Teferi and their associates and the sixty officials of the ancien regime. Like the King's Body Guard, the Derg's Security Department was in charge of the security of the palace; unlike it, however, it was in addition the breeding ground for assassination squads that haunted the cities up and down the country before and after Mengistu's ascent to absolutist power in February 1977.

It was these positions (head of the secretariat, overall head of political affairs and overall head of the security subcommittee of the Derg) that Mengistu lost as a result of Teferi's coup against him in December 1976, and it was these powers that he regained as of February 1977, and more. As of then, he became, inter alia, chairman of the Derg, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, chairman of the Defence and Security Council, defender of the peace and order of the broad masses and the integrity of the country, and responsible for taking measures against anti-people and counter-revolutionary elements. These positions brought the resources of state and people's coercion under his control. As indicated in the last section, the use of force and violence showed a dramatic increase after Mengistu's ascent to absolutism; it must be concluded, therefore, that his 'successful' political career was dependent on his readiness to resort to the use of force and violence rather than on his other merits of leadership.

From the perspective of the historical comparative, the use of force and violence by a dictator appears to be the natural progression from the anarchy that follows a revolutionary uprising. From a different perspective, the reliance on the use of force and violence implies the absence of legitimacy on the part of the government.

Whatever the merits of the contending hypotheses, they both go to explain why Mengistu had to totalitarianise and militarise the whole of society. He had organised the civilian population into mass organisations, armed them, and, as noted in the last section, used them as instruments to subdue the opposition. These, coupled with the building up of the security forces (including the biggest army in black Africa, the newly created people's militia, the police force and a greatly expanded separate department of intelligence), transformed the country into one mass force of coercion. Haile Selassie before him managed to rule Ethiopia and hold it together with a minimum of force and violence.

#### FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

1. See Chapter 4 Section AI above; and Lefort, R., Ethiopia- An Heretical Revolution, Zed press, 1983, p. 181.
2. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia, Red Sea Press, January, 1989.
3. "The Broad Masses of Ethiopia: Your Revolution has been transformed from a defensive to an offensive position", Addis Zemen, No. 1228, February 4, 1977.
4. "Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu's Speech at the revolution Square", Addis Zemen, No. 1229, February 5, 1977.
5. "The Speech of Lieutenant-Colonel Mengistu Haile-Mariam (Chairman of the Provisional Military Government) Concerning the Internationalist War of the Conservative Forces of the Region and Imperialism through the Instrumentality of the Internal Class Enemies of EDU, EPRP and ELF", Addis Zemen, No. 1284, April 13, 1977.
6. Korn David A, Ethiopia, United States and the Soviet Union, Croom Helm, 1986, p. 28.
7. "Which One is the Main Contradiction of the Time?" Revolutionary Ethiopia, Second Year, No. 30, July 22nd, 1977; and second year No. 31, August 7, 1977.
8. See Lefort R. at No. 1 above pp.181 and 189; and Markakis J. and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia, Red sea Press, 1986, pp. 161-2 and 172.
9. See Markakis and Nega Ayele at Note 8 above p. 175.
10. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, acting Foreign Minister at the time, gives a vivid description of his personal experience at the hands of Mengistu's private army - see Dawit Wolde Giorgis at Note 2 above.
11. Paul H. Bietzke, Law, Development and the Ethiopian Revolution, Bucknell University Press, 1982, p. 162.
12. The Provisional Military Government, "Dust will not Disappear from Corners where the Broom

- cannot Reach", Addis Zemen, No. 1306, May 8, 1977.
13. See Brietzke at Note 11 above, p. 169.
  14. See Brietzke at Note 11 above, p. 196.
  15. Ibid.
  16. A lot of literature on the 'Red Terror' deals only with what happened in the capital city. In fact, what took place in some of the provincial towns, like Gondar in the North-West, Desse in the North and Harar in the East was in some respects more horrific than the incidents in Addis Ababa. The practice varied from place to place and the description is probably a fair representation of the general developments at the time.
  17. EPRP had a president as a chairman; the meetings of its politburo were presided over by rotating chairmanships of its members. Nevertheless, Birhane Maskel Reda, who was the most recognised of the founders of EPRP, is often presumed to be its leader.
  18. Melaku Tegegn, "EPRP: A Historical Background and a Critical Assessment of its Experiences", The Second Annual Conference on the Horn of Africa, New School for Social Research, New York, May 29th-30, 1987.
  19. "A High Delegation Goes to the Soviet Union", Addis Zemen, No. 1052, July 6, 1976.
  20. Korn, David A, Ethiopia, the United States and the Soviet Union, Croom Helm, 1986, pp.26-27.
  21. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia, Red Sea Press, 1989, p.43.
  22. The International Herald Tribune, July 27 1977, cited by Korn at Note 2 above, p. 35.
  23. See note 2 above at p. 35.
  24. Articles 5(1) (4), 6(2) and 7(8) of Proclamation 110/1977.
  25. Article 8(2) (7) of Proclamation 110/1977.
  26. See note 3 above at pp. 36-37.
  27. See note 2 above at pp. 28-29.
  28. See note 3 above at p. 45.

29. Ibid.
30. David Korn maintains that Western withdrawal of promised weapons assistance was because they had learnt that Bare had sent his regular troops into Ethiopia; on the other hand, Dawit Wolde Giorgis points out that Korn had also stated that the U.S. knew all along about Somalia troops movements, even prior to July 1977.
31. "Comrade Chairman's Speech to the Entire Ethiopian People", Addis Zemen, No. 1396, August 21 1977.
32. See note 2 above at pp.39-41.
33. Vivo R.V. Ethiopia's Revolution, International Publications, New York 1978, p. 61.
34. See note 15 above at p. 38.
35. Lefort, R., Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution? Zed Press, 1983, p. 148.
36. Brietzke, Paul H., Law, Development and the Ethiopian revolution, Bucknell University Press, p. 196.
37. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia, Red Sea Press 1979.
38. See note 3 above at pp. 16-34.
39. See note 3 above at p. 16.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE FORMATION OF THE WORKER'S PARTY OF ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia is one of the few African countries that survived without being colonized by the Western powers. This fact, more than any other, perhaps kept her oblivious of Western political processes, notably the process concerned with political parties. An exception to this was Eritrea, which after having been under Italian colonial administration for about fifty years, came under British administration from 1941 to 1952 as an enemy occupied territory. In the 1940's a number of political organisations sprang up around the question of the disposal of the territory. It is arguable whether those political organisations were "parties", since they did not have a programme on questions other than the disposal of Eritrea; at any rate, with the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1952 by a decision of the UN General Assembly, the political organisations withered and died.

The last constitution of Haile Salassie's government, which was issued in 1955, provided that "every Ethiopian subject has the right to engage in any occupation and, to that end, to form or join associations in accordance with the law".<sup>1</sup> This was the only provision of the constitution that could arguably be interpreted to allow the right to form political organisations. Nevertheless, it strongly implies that the formation of an association has to be related to occupation, and hence, excludes the formation of political organisations. In reality too, there was never any public demand to form political organisations, and the general assumption was that the legal right to do so did not exist.

Interestingly enough, Ethiopia had a bicameral parliament during Haile Salassie's time. The Chamber of

Deputies (the lower house) was composed of elected members. A candidate to the Chamber of Deputies presented to his constituency not the programme of a party, but his own. Similarly, once he was elected, he voted on proposed legislations (initiated by the King, the Cabinet or a certain number of MP's) not along party lines but in accordance with his persuasion, his interests and those of his constituency.

As noted previously, the first attempt towards the formation of parties came with the establishment of political organisations in student circles abroad, starting from the early 1970's. Perhaps spurred by adherents of these organisations and similar other ones in the country, the activists of the early 1974 uprising demanded the right to form political parties for the first time. Even then there were some in the other sections of the urban population who argued against the idea because, according to them, the experience of Africa had shown that parties were a source of division along ethnic and other lines without necessarily achieving anything obvious.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in response to the dominant demand, Endalkachew's draft constitution provided that "all Ethiopians have the right to establish or be members of any association, including political parties, provided that its religious, racial or any other purposes are not detrimental to the integrity of the nation".<sup>3</sup>

With its seizure of power in September 1974, the Derg abandoned Endalkachew's Draft Constitution and, with it, the provision which would have served as the basis for the development of a multi-party system. In December of the same year, the Derg adopted its first and major economic and political programme (Ethiopian Socialism) in which it was argued that if the desired objective is to bring about fundamental economic and political changes (and not to give freedom to individuals to go their own way), it was necessary to have "... a national party which would bring together all progressive forces into a

united front and which is capable of attracting and accommodating the entire people of the country".<sup>4</sup>

In spite of the Derg's advocacy of a single mass party system, a number of predominantly leftist political organisations surfaced in the course of 1975 and 1976. The Derg fell under the sway of these leftist organisations and again revised its policy towards formation of parties. In April 1976, it adopted the National Democratic Revolutionary Programme of Ethiopia (NDRPE), which envisaged the establishment of a Workers' Party through the formation of a joint front among the progressive political organisations (organisations which were anti-feudal, anti-imperialist and anti-bureaucratic-capitalist) as well as among the democratic organisations which were willing to work under the umbrella of the joint front. The question of whether the organisations that would join the front would lose or retain their identity after the formation of the party is not addressed; subject to this proviso, the programme could be said to endorse a multi-party system to be developed among the "exploited" and "progressive" classes.

The policy of the NDRP differed from that of Ethiopian Socialism in two respects. First, according to Ethiopian Socialism, all Ethiopians had the right to organize and become members of a party, whereas according to the NDRP only progressives could do so. Second, the former envisaged the establishment of a single party system whereas the latter envisaged the formation of a number of parties, though it appears that, at the end of the day, one party (the Workers' Party) was presumably expected to emerge. Essentially, the difference was between a mass party and a class party.

This chapter is concerned with an explanation of the processes of the establishment of a party in Ethiopia - processes that culminated in the establishment of the "Workers' Party of Ethiopia" in 1984. It came about not through the formation of progressive and democratic

organisations and their merger (as envisaged by the NDRP), but as the result of the recruitment to membership of individuals that Mengistu considered worthy on account of their loyalty to him. Since only one party was allowed, and since the highly personalized process of forming it denied any role to the pre-existing political organisations, the latter were eliminated.

**(A) THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE JOINT FRONT OF THE  
ETHIOPIAN MARXIST-LENINIST ORGANISATIONS**

It is to be presumed that, in the wake of Mengistu's successful coup on February 3, 1977, his coalition would march forward with renewed vigour. On February 26, partisans of his coalition (AESM, the Ethiopian Oppressed Peoples' Revolutionary Struggle, The Workers' League, the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization, and Revolutionary Flame) issued a joint communiqué announcing the establishment of a Joint Front of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations among themselves. According to the communiqué, the main function of the Joint Front was to provide its member organisations with a platform on which they would struggle jointly in order to bring about the formation of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia.<sup>5</sup>

In March, the Joint Front came up with a "guide line" in which the member organisations declared that they had agreed on the main questions concerning the revolution; on resolving outstanding questions on the platform of the Joint Front; and on a strategy to bring together progressives to struggle jointly. In the following month, the Front adopted "a joint programme of action" in which the members assessed the political and security situation in the country; characterized the exploiting classes and the political organisations which did not join them as enemies of the revolution; and called upon the people to support the Joint Front in its struggle against the enemies that were attacking the country on three fronts. In May, the Front adopted its

programme or constitution which was similar to the programmes of its members discussed earlier. Finally, it launched its paper called "Voice of Unity" in August, 1977.<sup>6</sup>

The Joint Front was a separate organization from its members. The highest organ within it was the Central Committee made up of three representatives from each of the member organisations.<sup>7</sup> Its functions included: making policies of the Organization; deciding on the nature of relations between the Front and other organisations; giving directives to its subordinate committees; attempting to create the situation in which the Front would be transformed into a merger; and admitting and dismissing members.<sup>8</sup> The Central Committee was directed to hold fortnightly meetings in order to discharge its tasks.<sup>9</sup> Also, the Central Committee had an Executive Committee which would oversee the implementation of its decisions; the Executive Committee was made up of a chairman, a secretary, a treasurer and other members of the Central Committee.<sup>10</sup> Further, there were no less than nine joint-subcommittees in the areas of propaganda and agitation, the peoples' Army, peoples' organizational affairs, discipline, nationalities, foreign affairs, economy, education, and intelligence and defence. Finally, there were two additional committees intended to provide common services to the other committees; they were a Studies and Planning Committee and the Joint Front Activities Management Committee.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps, the nature of the relationship between the Joint Front and the member organisations is worthy of note. On the one hand, the latter are authorized to keep their organizational independence from the Front; to adopt their own decisions; to agitate their positions among the people; to expand their individual organisations; and even to withdraw from the Front without posing danger to its existence.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, however, they are allowed to do these things only in accordance with the provisions of the Front's

Constitution;<sup>13</sup> they had to discharge the tasks of the Front; and they had to implement the decisions of the Front.<sup>14</sup> This apparent contradiction between independence and subservience would be resolved if it is viewed from the perspective that the establishment of the Joint Front is one step in the process of forming the Workers' Party of Ethiopia through the gradual merger of the member organisations. In the words of the February joint communique of the Front: "after having examined the history of the revolutionary struggle of many countries and the circumstances of Ethiopia, the five organisations have agreed that the most scientific and proven of the methods of forming a Workers' Party is through the bringing together of the forces of the different Marxist groups in order to conduct a true ideological struggle on tactical and strategic questions and to merge into one organization".<sup>15</sup> From this perspective, the degree of subservience of the member organisations to the Joint Front is the measure of their merger and of the approach of the formation of the Party.

However, the merger of the Joint Front was for the indefinite future; in the meantime, it was directed to concentrate its attention on the implementation of the other objectives of the NDRPE other than the formation of the Party. These included: strengthening relations with other Marxist groups; helping to establish and coordinate nationalities' movements, mass organisations and other anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, and anti-bureaucratic political organisations, and bring them within the orbit of a broad joint front;<sup>16</sup> eliminating the internal enemies (EPRP, EDU and the Eritrean secessionists); circulating Marxist-Leninist literature among the people; training cadres at home and abroad and deploying them among the people; fighting against narrow nationalism and chauvinism; and struggling for the recognition of democratic rights for the oppressed people, for the politicization, organization and arming of the masses,

for the politicization of the army and militia and for the recognition of the culture of the various nationalities.<sup>17</sup>

From this point of view, the differences, if any, between the Joint Front and POMOA, which was retained after the establishment of the former, are not clear. They were similar in that both were managed by the leaders of the member organisations of Mengistu's coalition in that their mandates (the promotion of the objectives of the NDRPE as indicated in the previous paragraph) overlapped. On the other hand, they were different in that the Joint Front was, theoretically at least, a voluntary association of organisations which depended for its income on the contribution of its members; whereas POMOA, as indicated previously, was a fully-fledged government agency with a budget from the treasury. Perhaps a more important difference between the two was one of emphasis: the Joint Front was primarily concerned with the formation of the Party; whereas POMOA was primarily concerned with the politicisation and organization of the masses of the people.

Be that as it may, the establishment of the Joint Front of the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organisations did not lead to the formation of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia through the merger of its members, nor in any other way. On the contrary, each one of them dropped out of the Front one by one in the subsequent two and a half years; the departure from the Front of each one of them was then followed by their liquidation; this finally opened the way for Mengistu to reconstruct the Party personally all over again. As will be argued in the following sections, such a state of affairs was brought about by the basic contradiction which revolved around the question of power and which beset the Joint Front almost from its inception.

**(B) THE LIQUIDATION OF AESM AND EOPRS; "THE UNITY OF THE JOINT FRONT OF THE ETHIOPIAN MARXIST - LENINIST ORGANISATIONS SHALL FLOURISH"**

**THE LIQUIDATION OF AESM**

In the wake of his successful coup on February 3, 1977, Mengistu occupied himself with strengthening the Army and raising a militia to defend the country and his government from internal and external threats, redefining Ethiopia's foreign policy and her alliances, negotiating economic and military aid from the socialist countries, and generally manning the government single handedly. As explained in the previous chapter, the few people he consulted in these matters were drawn from the bureaucracy including the Derg and the diplomatic community of the socialist countries. This trend left the political organisations, which were partisans of Mengistu's coalition, out in the cold. Whereas before February they had a role to play in government activities, like drumming up support among their followers for Mengistu's faction in the Derg, they were, after February, limited to campaigning against EDU and EPRP and engaging the latter in an assassination match. This seemed to be the role that Mengistu had intended for them; the dominant slogan of the time (let the unity of the Joint Front flourish) meant uniting against the opposition as well as strengthening the Front.

In mid May, the most dominant of the members of the Joint Front (AESM) announced that it had held a national congress about that time and examined the political developments obtaining and had adopted its position on them. Judging by the contents of the report, the concern of AESM was no longer ~~EPRP~~ as had been the case previously, but the government itself. The report declared that AESM's relations with the Derg (Mengistu) would continue to be based on the principle of "critical support". Further, the report welcomed the support of

the socialist countries but warned that foreign aid must not be allowed to compromise the honour and independence of Ethiopia and her resolve to be self-reliant and that believing that it is possible to make a success of the revolution on the strength of foreign aid was not only deceiving oneself but also losing national independence. Even more alarming was the charge of the report that anti-revolutionary bureaucrats were eliminating AESM members along with those of the EPRP; and that AESM was resolved to struggle against the bureaucracy (a term used to encompass the functionaries of the state apparatus, including Derg members).<sup>18</sup>

The national congress of AESM did not limit itself to pointing out its dissatisfactions with the unfolding developments but also adopted strategies intended to improve its posture. The same report stated that AESM was resolved to struggle for the formation of a Marxist-Leninist party through the merger of the Joint Front members, for the formation of a Peoples' Revolutionary vanguard among mass organizations and for the establishment of a Peoples' Revolutionary Army. AESM, it continued, would struggle for the bringing of the vanguard of the mass organizations and the Peoples' Army under the leadership of the Joint Front and/or the Party. Furthermore, the report pointed out that AESM was to intensify its struggle for the recognition of democratic rights not under the slogan of "democratic rights to the oppressed quickly", as before, but under "democratic rights to the oppressed now". It argued that the declaration of democratic rights had been promised by the NDRPE as a matter of urgency; that Teferi's group, which had been obstructing its declaration, had been removed; and that the declaration of rights was important for the following reasons: to enable the member organizations of the Joint Front to mobilize the people; to struggle for the politicization, organization, and arming of the masses of the people; to discuss the differences among the members of the Front publicly

rather than basing their relations on rumour, suspicion, backbiting, and defamation as had been the case until then.<sup>19</sup>

The main thrust of AESM's strategy was to place itself as the dominant group within the Party to be established and to bring state power under its control. It had already built itself a substantial following in the mass organizations, particularly in the urban dwellers' associations, and was easily the most prominent organization of the members of the Joint Front. For example, so many pro-AESM slogans such as "AESM is our Party" and "AESM has armed us" were displayed at the 1977 May Day rallies that AESM was at pains to deny their validity in case they induced anger and jealousy on the part of the government and the other members of the Joint Front.<sup>20</sup> If, in addition to this, democratic rights were granted, as urged by AESM, and it was as a result able to agitate among the people freely, AESM would be in a position to swell its ranks and would accordingly have a greater representation in the party to be. According to its other strategy, the mass organizations and the Army were to come under the leadership of the party - a party which would be dominated by AESM and which would give Mengistu and his organization (Revolutionary Flame), as well as the other members of the Front, a subservient position within it.

In spite of its bold posturing, AESM was, as of May, very much on the defensive. In June, it charged that malicious slanders were being circulated against it and expressed concern that, once such slanders were popularized, the stigma they would leave in the minds of the people would be difficult to remove, as had happened in the case of the erroneous characterization of EPRP as an "anarchist" and "Trotskyite" organization.<sup>21</sup> In July, it came up with no less than ten slanders, such as that the AESM was the organization of feudal lords, of arrogance, of narrow nationalists, and of the Oromos,

and attributed them to bureaucrats who sought to effect a feud between it and the Derg.<sup>22</sup>

In effect, AESM's protestations were appeals to Mengistu to continue to collaborate with it; however, its appeals were obviously falling on deaf ears. It has already been noted that Proclamation 108 of December, 1976, had stripped Mengistu's coalition of any role in political activities by transferring the control of POMOA from the Supreme Organizing Committee (chaired by Mengistu) to various organs of the Derg, particularly the Standing Committee. The control of POMOA by the Standing Committee was retained by Proclamation 110 of February, 1977, which was issued in order to amend the December Proclamation. On July 14, two further Proclamations were enacted to amend the Proclamation that had been issued to establish POMOA: the first reaffirmed the continued administration of POMOA by the Standing Committee,<sup>23</sup> and the second brought the Yekatit 66 Political School, which had been run by POMOA till then, under the same Committee of the Derg.<sup>24</sup> Thus, at a time when AESM was struggling to dominate the Joint Front and the party to be established and to bring the mass organizations and the Army under the Front/party, Mengistu was divesting the Joint Front of any role in the running of POMOA and the Political School and, therefore, of any role in the agitation to politicize, organize and arm the masses of the people.

If AESM had any doubts that its troubles were caused only by reactionary bureaucrats, it was clear to it by now that, reactionary or not, Mengistu was not on its side either. On July 28, it announced that it had decided to withdraw some of its members from the official forums and had placed them underground for a number of reasons including the following: Marxist-Leninist organizations must implement the right of self-determination of nationalities immediately, and not recognize it only in principle, as the Joint Front had done;<sup>25</sup> democratic rights were not recognized; instead of

dealing with material issues, the Joint Front was bogged down with defaming AESM and with drawing up programmes that would never be implemented; AESM's proposals to the Derg and to the Joint Front had not been acted upon simply because they had emanated from that organization; the Derg's failure to arm the broad masses in the east had opened the way for the attack on the revolution and the country by reactionary classes and the Republic of Somalia; since March, the arming of urban dwellers' associations had slackened exposing AESM supporters to further assassinations; the feudo-bourgeois bureaucracy on which the Derg had been relying on for advice, was eliminating AESM leaders, especially in the provinces.<sup>26</sup> In essence, the thrust of AESM's charges was that counter-revolution had set in and that Mengistu was a party to it.

It appears that AESM was fully aware of the risks involved in deciding to go underground. At the time, it called upon the Derg and especially the left-wing within it (Mengistu) not to take hasty and emotional measures against AESM's members and supporters because of the decision to go underground and pointed out that, otherwise, what happened to the Communists of the Sudan and Chile would repeat itself in Ethiopia.<sup>27</sup> The fact that AESM went underground in spite of its knowledge of the risks involved in so doing lends support to the probability that the organization was in a desperate situation and to the sincerity of its allegations that malicious slanders were being circulated against it and that its members were being eliminated.

Be that as it may, soon after AESM's "fleeing" (as the official version would have it), a government order was apparently issued to its agents of coercion not to arrest but to take "revolutionary measures" against the organization's leaders and members on sight. A November 19 circular written in the name of the Derg to the diplomatic community of the socialist countries put the same, thus: "... workers and peasants hunted down and

rounded up those who fled the revolutionary camp and handed them over to the government."<sup>28</sup>

Within months of AESM's "fleeing the revolutionary camp", hundreds of "its leaders and members" were executed in their houses and offices or on the streets and in woods in the vicinity of towns as they were trying "to go underground" and others were arrested and tortured. With the declaration of the second round of "red terror" in November, ostensibly directed against EPRP, and the resulting intensification of the street gun-fights, the divisions along which the "civil war" was fought became enormously distorted; there is no doubt, however, that AESM members were also the victims of the second round of the terror, if not its intended targets. The ideological mentor of Mengistu and leader of AESM (Haile Fida) was arrested with several of his close associates some 40 kilometres to the north of Addis Ababa, tortured and summarily executed while in prison some two years later, i.e. after the whole thing had burnt out. Despite AESM's insistence throughout its political career that it was an underground organization, its liquidation was an easy matter since its leaders and members were well known to the government; it had lost its clandestinity when it adopted what it called "the principle of critical support" in February, 1975, and started working closely with the Derg.

The circular to the diplomatic community of the socialist countries, which was issued along with the declaration of the 2nd round of the red terror, denied the validity of AESM's accusations against the government and counter-charged that AESM was itself an arrogant, opportunistic, and pseudo-progressive-petit-bourgeois organization. More serious charges made by the circular included: AESM had openly opposed Ethiopia's closer relations with the socialist country, especially with Cuba and the Soviet Union; it had attempted to disband the militia which was being trained to fight against Somalia's aggression; it had supported Somalia's naked

aggression by arguing that it was a war of liberation; and it had committed the most cowardly and inexcusable crime against the revolution by abandoning the revolutionary camp at a time when the countries was encircled by enemies.<sup>29</sup> As AESM predicted, some of the charges against it, e.g. that AESM was arrogant and Oromo-centric and had wrongly timed going underground, have since been widely believed by the public though the surviving members of the organization still vehemently deny the truth of the charges.

Obviously, AESM's withdrawal of its members from the official forums and going underground meant abandoning the Joint Front of the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations as well as other legal platforms. The Joint Front acknowledged this fact in April 1978 by claiming to have dismissed the organization from membership as of that month. It justified its action on similar accusations as those made by the government against AESM.<sup>30</sup> Apparently, the reason for delay of the Front was prompted by the fear of the government that publicity of the rupture might provoke AESM's supporters into an insurrectionary uprising.

One of the points emphasized by the April meeting of the Joint Front was the question of democratic rights. It argued that AESM's slogan of "democratic rights to the oppressed without limitation now" was contrary to the Marxist principle that real rights could only be guaranteed after power had passed from the exploiting classes to the broad masses; that such power could pass to the broad masses only after the Marxist-Leninist party was established; and that AESM's slogan must, therefore, be replaced by "democratic rights to the oppressed through struggle."<sup>31</sup> The so-called AESM slogan, which was being echoed throughout the country by members of the Joint Front and Mengistu himself, was thus dropped as of then. Whatever the merit of the theoretical argument made in support of the new slogan, the decision was a very important one. The term "democratic rights" was

wide enough to embrace individual rights like freedom of speech and conscience as well as group rights like the right to organise associations and parties and the right to self-determination of cultural units. These rights were at the centre of the 1974 popular uprising and of the demands of EPRP and AESM from then; as such, it would seem appropriate that the Derg should have met them in some positive manner. However, the Joint Front's allegedly Marxian argument for the rejection of democratic rights provided a rhetorical basis for the Derg's pre-existing policy on those rights and for the removal of the question from its agenda indefinitely.

#### THE LIQUIDATION OF THE ETHIOPIAN OPPRESSED PEOPLES' REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE

The troubles of the Ethiopian Oppressed Peoples' Revolutionary Struggle with the other members of the Joint Front and the government appear to have begun at the same time as those of AESM. Both organizations espoused similar positions on the questions of the time as pointed out in the last section; it is not surprising, therefore, that, after AESM's demise, the Ethiopian Oppressed Peoples' Revolutionary Struggle resisted pressure from the other members of the Front and the government to condemn AESM as a "right roader". Also important was the refusal of the Ethiopian Oppressed Peoples' Revolutionary Struggle to encourage the second round of red terror which was declared in November, 1977, and which was probably directed against not only the EPRP but also AESM. Quite apart from refusing to endorse the red terror in the meetings of the Joint Front, it went further and soon afterwards issued a lengthy critique agreeing with many of the points made by AESM earlier, condemning the way the red terror was conducted and demanding that those who had eliminated their own enemies or made personal gains by taking advantage of their powers under the red terror be brought to justice.

Having officially confronted the Joint Front and the government thus, the leaders of the Ethiopian Oppressed Peoples' Revolutionary Struggle began disappearing from the legal forums like the Joint Front as of January, 1978. In June, the Joint Front acknowledged what was in effect the withdrawal of the organization from the Front by claiming to have suspended it until such a time as it had met the Front's criteria of membership.<sup>32</sup> Later, the Revolutionary Flame's paper justified the "suspension" of the organization from membership on the following grounds: the organization had failed to condemn AESM; on the contrary, it had advocated "democratic rights quickly" which was similar to AESM's position of "democratic rights now"; it had done this to get a short cut to power; its cadres were not conscious enough; it had contacts with EPRP and the Oromo Liberation Front; it had promoted narrow nationalism; and it had supported reactionary Somalia's invasion of socialist Ethiopia.<sup>33</sup>

The fate of the leaders of the Ethiopian Oppressed Peoples' Revolutionary Struggle was similar to that of the leaders of AESM. A number left for the countryside and some among them who managed to survive, perhaps joined the Oromo Liberation Front. The leader of the organization (Baro Tomsa) was found dead in the countryside under mysterious circumstances. Those who were arrested are still (1989) languishing in a high security detention centre in Addis Ababa without trial and without sentence; close observers of the Ethiopian political scene wonder why the government found it necessary to incarcerate them for much longer than it did the leaders of other political organizations.

**(C) THE ELIMINATION OF THE WORKER'S LEAGUE;  
"THE WORKERS' PARTY SHALL BE ESTABLISHED THROUGH THE  
MERGER OF ORGANIZATIONS"**

With the elimination of EPRP and AESM, which were the most important of the leftist organizations, as well as of the Ethiopian Oppressed Peoples' Revolutionary Struggle, the veterans of the student movement were effectively removed from the political scene in Ethiopia. The only remaining offshoot of the Ethiopian Student movement (the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization) was too small to make much difference; its role was to be limited to siding with one or other of the remaining members of the Joint Front. This left the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame which grew by leaps and bounds as the others declined. The bulk of the rank and file members of the first three groups that survived the executions, imprisonment and torture that ensued the falling out of their organizations with the Derg, flocked willy-nilly to the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame and swelled their ranks. Those who shifted their allegiances were young recruits who probably for the most part were introduced to Marxism-Leninism in the post - 1974 period. The core of the membership of both the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame was, however, predominantly drawn from the army, starting from the inception of the organizations. Interestingly enough, the great majority of these civilian and military members of both groups were given their political education in the country by the veterans of the Ethiopian Students' Movement. A section were also trained abroad; a Derg paper stated that by September, 1976, a total number of 313 individuals had received a month's to a year's training in the east European countries <sup>34</sup> with many more to follow suit subsequently. By the end of 1977, therefore,

the era of the veterans of the Ethiopian Student Movement had given way to the era of what can be called "instant communists".

At the time of the elimination of Teferi Bante's group in February, 1977, the Workers' League had lost its founder (Dr. Senaye Likae) and its other prominent leader (Colonel Daniel Haile) who was chief of the Derg's security. It is widely believed that the death of the two was more important for Mengistu's rise to power than the elimination of his colleagues in the Derg since they and their organization were well entrenched in the army and in the central government and, hence, in a position to oust him from his position at will. However, despite the loss of two of its most prominent leaders, the Workers' League continued to thrive under the direction of a Colonel Shitaye (who was by all accounts as strong-willed as his predecessors) and became the second most powerful organization after AESM.

By 1978, however, Revolutionary Flame had also become a power to contend with and was in fact on the way to prevailing over the Workers' League. In the first place, it was able to attract, more effectively than the Workers' League, the defectors from the organizations that had been eliminated. Secondly, it was engaged, during the same period, in a massive recruitment drive among the military and civilian bureaucracy, including the highest officials. The reason for the successes of Revolutionary Flame was the fact that it was led by Mengistu and his close associates in the government and the fact that as a result it could induce fear or favour within the public.

Despite the underlying rivalries, the Workers' league, Revolutionary Flame and the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization seemed prepared to spearhead the formation of a workers' party

for Ethiopia. This was clearly reflected in an April issue of the Front's paper (Voice of Unity) which criticized the Front's cadres for their lack of political consciousness and for their attempt to replace the supreme power of the people by the supreme power of an organization and by individual dictatorship, which, according to the paper, was worse. Lenin was quoted as having said that anyone who weakens the iron discipline of the workers' party even slightly is a supporter of the bourgeoisie.<sup>35</sup> The paper explained further that the weakness of the Joint Front was the result of the fact that the member organizations had too much independence from the Front and that, therefore, the relationship between the two must be based on the principle of democratic-centralism.<sup>36</sup>

In June, the member organizations of the Joint Front issued a revised version of their original joint communiqué and action programme to serve as the basis of what they called "the transitional period" (the transition from the collaboration of the organizations to their merger). The joint communiqué stated that they had agreed, *inter alia*, to create the workers' party through the merger of the three existing member organizations of the Joint Front and other truly Marxist-Leninist groups that might emerge in the future; to draw up the bylaws governing the structure of the Joint Front during its transitional period and the structure, programme and Constitution of the party to be established; and to make the necessary effort to enable the cadres of the Joint Front to conduct strong ideological and political agitation within the army and the militia in order to make the latter two accept the leadership of the Front as well as convert them into a peoples' revolutionary army.<sup>37</sup> The programme of action also declared that the three organizations had arrived at a joint position on

the above points as well as others. It stated, for example, that they had agreed to strengthen the collaboration among themselves and to explore all means by which the collaboration would be transformed into a merger as soon as possible; and to make a joint effort to increase the quality and quantity of cadres and to establish a paper in which political questions will be analyzed for the benefit of the cadres. According to it, the reason for the speeding up of the merger of the organizations was the fact that AESM and the Ethiopian Oppressed Peoples' Revolutionary Struggle had dropped out of the revolutionary camp and the fact that a new historical juncture had been reached.<sup>38</sup>

Certain aspects of these joint positions had undesirable implications for the government and for the member organizations of the Joint Front, which plunged the latter into another crisis soon after the agreements were drawn. Obviously, what was being advocated by the Joint Front then was the same as what AESM had advocated a year earlier. The Front was arguing that the relationship between it and its members must be subjected to the discipline of democratic-centralism leading to a speedy establishment of the party through the merger of the member organizations; that such a party must be under the control of the supreme power of the broad masses and must never fall under the sway of individual dictatorship; and that the cadres, the army, and the militia must come under its and the party leadership. This was a drive to bring the government under the central leadership of the Joint Front and the party, and a gibe against Mengistu and his ascent to the heights of autocratic rule.

This was a time when Mengistu was celebrating his victories against the invading forces of Somalia and against EDU, EPRP and Eritrean insurgents. The challenge posed by the Joint Front was another obstacle in his assertion of personal power. Nevertheless, he was now preoccupied with the war-torn economy: the effects of

the devastation of the war had to be remedied and the national economy mobilized. With this in mind, he travelled all over the socialist countries in search of aid, and in the summer of 1978 put in place the planning machinery under his personal control. Those in the Joint Front who thought that such important matters should be carried out under the guidance of the party and that, therefore, the establishment of the latter should be given priority over the launching of a planned economy felt belittled; it was obvious that Mengistu meant to run the economy without the party; the Derg had also adopted the nationalization measures of 1975 without the party.

Another source of difficulty was the fact that the member organizations had not clearly defined the process by which the merger was to be created. Indeed, they had agreed to carry it out on the basis of the principle of democratic-centralism (which is in any case a very elusive concept) and to draw up the bylaws which would govern the structure of the merger; however, they had not come to an understanding of whether each member organization was to be given an equal quota of representation in the merger, whether it was going to be determined in relation to the size of membership or whether it was going to be determined in relation to the "quality" (basically meaning academic background) of the members. Each of the organizations continued to advocate the alternative that would most favour its emergence as the dominant group in the party to be established. One of the effects of this was, nonetheless, to intensify the rivalry between the organizations to increase their members in case that should give them an edge in the party to be formed.

It has been noted above that the Joint Front's paper had charged that some of the cadres were promoting individual dictatorship; it appears that the charge was directed against members of Revolutionary Flame since their organization was the handmaiden of Mengistu. However, though the bulk of Revolutionary Flame's

membership may have been faithful to him, it appears there was a section within it which was committed to party rather than individual dictatorship. Conversely, there were also sections within all of the leftist organizations which took the reverse position, betraying their own groups in order to buy his friendship.

It was in this confused state of affairs that the elimination of the Workers' League's members started in the summer of 1978. The cleavage along which the armed struggle was fought is often seen as between the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame; by and large, this is correct; however, the point overlooks the other important sections of the state apparatus which were even more effective in urban guerrilla warfare than the army itself. Notable in this regard were the Derg's security force and sections of the Intelligence Department.

The final show-down between the Workers' League, on the one hand, and the Joint Front and the government, on the other, came when the former apparently plotted to overthrow Mengistu in the middle of September, 1978. The plotters were betrayed by some among them and were rounded up and eliminated on the day when the coup was supposed to have taken place. In January of the following year, Revolutionary Flame's paper criticized the Workers' League's "crimes" against the revolution as follows: it had advocated the reinstatement of "the red Terror" against EPRP, AESM, and the reactionary within the military bureaucracy with the intention of eliminating the true progressives; it had tried to dominate the Joint Front by increasing the number of its members in the organization at the expense of the other groups; and it had infiltrated its members into Revolutionary Flame with the intention of being represented in the Joint Front and in the merger through both organizations.<sup>39</sup>

Interestingly enough, members of the Revolutionary Flame were being arrested at the same time as the Workers' League was being eliminated. According to Pliny

the Middle Aged, well over a hundred of the military cadres were imprisoned between August and October, 1978. Apparently, the reason for this was the split within Revolutionary Flame concerning the question of whether the military cadres should continue to come under the control of the Military Political Affairs Department of the Derg, headed by Mengistu's henchman (Sergeant Legese Asfaw) or whether they should come under POMOA.<sup>40</sup> No doubt, those that were arrested were advocates not only of transferring the military cadres to the control of POMOA but also of party dictatorship (as opposed to individual dictatorship) and presumably were also the ones who were accused of having been planted by the Workers' League in Revolutionary Flame.

Be that as it may, the Joint Front of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations was declared by its members to have survived these events of 1978 and the Workers' League to have continued to be a member. The only thing that was reported to have changed was the replacement of the "reactionary leaders" of the latter by new ones which meant that the ones who had betrayed the September coup had become its leaders. Colonel Shitaye was replaced by Shwan-Dagn Belete. As will be noted in the next section, however, neither the Joint Front nor the Workers' League really survived the forces of centralization and personalization of organizations.

**(D) THE ELIMINATION OF THE JOINT FRONT OF ETHIOPIAN  
MARXIST -LENINIST ORGANIZATIONS AND OF EMLRO; "THE  
WORKERS' PARTY SHALL BE ESTABLISHED THROUGH THE  
MERGER OF COMMUNIST INDIVIDUALS"**

Towards the beginning of February, 1979, the Joint Front's paper announced that its members had agreed that:

1. they would not recruit new members henceforth;
2. they would form the party, not through the merger of organizations, but through the merger

of sincere communist individuals who are versed in Marxism-Leninism;

3. starting from its eruption, the revolution had a centre, the Derg was that centre, and the Derg was revolutionary;
4. in order to form the party, it is necessary to establish a centre made up, firstly, of individuals who are members of the three organizations of the Joint Front and who are known for their revolutionary merit and, secondly, of individuals who are not members of those organizations but who, nevertheless, meet the same requirements;
5. the centre will create the structure of the party by recruiting members in accordance with revolutionary criteria and by giving priority to members of the Joint Front's organizations; and,
6. as the party grows by receiving the necessary cooperation from the organizations, the latter will wither and die.<sup>41</sup>

The points of this agreement constitute a substantial departure from the past; their import will be dealt with in this subsection and in the following one.

It was Revolutionary Flame which first suggested the idea of forming the party through the "merger" of individuals as opposed to the merger of organizations. In a January, 1979, article called "A Proposal of Revolutionary Flame Concerning the Formation of the Workers Party", it had argued that the effort made by member organizations of the Joint Front till then had not led to the formation of the party because they had not pursued the correct Marxist-Leninist theory on merger; that, instead of agitating for the acceptance by communist individuals of the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism and for the adoption by them of a common strategy to bring about one leadership, they had been fighting for the proliferation of organizations in the mistaken belief that they would come together through

struggle with the result that different and fragmented leaderships had emerged. Further, the article had explained that the main principles that would bring about the merger of communist individuals were: the acceptance of Marxism-Leninism as the main instrument of struggle; the analysis, on the basis of this ideology, of the level of development, history and nature of the society concerned; the adoption of common positions on the destruction of the old order and on building the new one, especially on the construction of a communist society.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the February agreement argued that the attempt to form the party through the merger of organizations had led Marxists to concentrate on form rather than content, to rivalry among them and to factionalism. It noted that in the 1905 congress of Russian parties, 26 of them were represented but, due to Lenin's determined leadership and due to the struggle of other committed Marxists, only one party emerged at the end; that in 1929, there were 3 parties in Vietnam but a year later, there was only one.<sup>43</sup>

These were the rhetorical justifications for the shift away from what was called "merger of organizations" to "merger of individuals". It must be noted that the collaboration of the member organizations of the Joint Front had come about at a time when each of them was afraid of being ousted from its position by powerful contenders for power, notably the members of the officers' junta (other than members of Mengistu's faction) and EPRP. By 1979, nevertheless, not only these contenders for power but also all the forces of internal and external aggression that had emerged later had been subdued by Mengistu; with this, the external threat that had held the members of the Joint Front together had been removed and only the threat from within remained. If the Leninist party (which can be defined as the core of society and the major source of all authority) was to be formed through the merger of the organizations, it meant that all the individual members of those organizations

would become members of the party; under this scenario, the big organizations not only would dominate the rank and file membership but would also be in a position to elect their prominent members as leaders of the party. This appears to be at the heart of the decision to abolish the Joint Front of the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations and replace it with a "centre", the task of which was declared to be to bring about the formation of the workers' party not through the merger of organizations but through the "merger" of individuals.

Closely related to the abolition of the Joint Front was the demise of its remaining members especially of the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization. In the first place, the organizations were directed by the agreement to refrain from recruiting new members but instead concentrate on purging the reactionaries who had infiltrated their ranks. The pre-existing free rein on recruitment of members, which perhaps had allowed the infiltration of the organizations by "reactionaries", was best explained by a February directive of Revolutionary Flame to its members concerning the agreement under consideration. It said that normally an individual becomes a member of a communist party only when two or more members nominate him as a candidate; only when, on account of his conviction that he is revolutionary and able and willing to struggle, the candidate applies to the party to become a member; and only when he passes a special examination after having been studying Marxist-Leninist literature for at least a year from his nomination as a candidate. In the Ethiopian context, however, (the directive continued) instead of individuals approaching organizations, it was the latter which had an abundant number of membership forms, had been going to the individuals and forcing or begging them to become members; only in exceptional cases did they recruit them voluntarily.<sup>44</sup> There is no doubt that the decision to prohibit the organizations from indulging in further recruitment of members removed the pressure that had been

brought to bear on the public to join one group or another starting from well before the onset of the "red terror" (early 1977); it was greeted with a sense of relief. In this scenario, the prohibition marked the end of multiple sovereignty to which the public was subjected to for so long and the beginning of the final assertion of authority by the Leviathan to protect society from its members who by "nature are quarrelsome, brutish and selfish".

Secondly, not only were the organizations prohibited from engaging in further recruitment of members but they were themselves allowed to exist only until the party was established at which juncture they were to start withering away and dying . Though it can be argued that none of them survived the agreement under consideration, it is enough to give the example of the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization here.

At the beginning of 1978, the leader of that Organization (Ayed Mohamed) was gunned down in the Aboirre District of Addis Ababa presumably by EPRP. It is said that in the following days all the higher kebeles of the capital city (some 25 of them) were made to contribute 10 prisoners each for retaliatory executions. Be that as it may, Ayed was replaced by the articulate, but rather trusting, Tesfaye Mekonon, who led the organization for the rest of its political career. By all accounts, it was the weakest of the political organizations mentioned so far; in 1978 and 1979, its role was limited to supporting Revolutionary Flame in the latter's drive to prevail over the Workers' League in the Joint Front and in POMOA.

However, the Ethiopian Marxist - Leninist Revolutionary Organization fell out with Revolutionary Flame in the aftermath of the February 1979 agreement. Apparently, the difference between the two revolved around the question of representation on the centre which was supposed to constitute or establish the workers' party. The agreement did provide that the first group of

individuals who were to constitute the centre would come primarily from among the members of the organizations of the Joint Front; it did not, however, provide for the size and method of representation. The Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization insisted that each of the organizations should be accorded an equal quota of representation on the centre; Revolutionary Flame, on the other hand, sought admission to be based on the criteria of contribution to the revolution and degree of Marxist - Leninist consciousness. If Mengistu was the one who was to decide on Revolutionary Flame's criteria, as was the case later, it is obvious that he would use his discretionary powers in favour of his own organization. Further, if the criteria of "contribution to the revolution" included the number of executions perpetrated against "reactionaries", as it did, then the members of the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization stood little chance of competing with Revolutionary Flame. Be that as it may, the former's reluctance to yield on its position was used as an excuse to round up its leaders in June, 1979, and put them behind bars. It appears to be an "excuse" because, as will be noted in the following section, the process of launching Mengistu as the sole centre who would form the party must have been under way at about that time. At any rate, the leader of the Organization, Tesfaye Mekonon, was released from prison some years later; interestingly enough, he is the only leader of all the leftist organizations (with the exception of Mengistu) who has survived to tell the tale.

**(E) THE DISSOLUTION OF REVOLUTIONARY FLAME; "FORWARD WITH THE SOLE LEADERSHIP OF COMRADE MENGISTU HAILE-MARIAM"**

The February 1979 Agreement of the members of the Joint Front provided that the Front was to be dissolved and replaced by what it called "the Centre". Whereas the first was intended to bring about the formation of the

Workers' Party of Ethiopia through the merger of its member organizations, the second was said to achieve the same through the "merger" of committed Marxist-Leninist individuals. The Agreement further provided that the Centre would be made up, firstly, of individuals who were members of the remaining three organizations of the Joint Front known for their revolutionary merits and, secondly, of individuals who were not members of those organizations but were, nonetheless, meritorious Marxist-Leninists.<sup>45</sup> What should happen after the Centre was constituted in this way was clear: the Centre made up of the first group of individuals would recruit other committed Marxist-Leninists and grow into the Party. What was left obscure by the Agreement, however, was whether the member organizations to the Agreement would appoint their representatives to the Centre or whether an individual or group of individuals would screen who were committed Marxist-Leninists and appoint them to become the first members of the Centre. As it transpired, Mengistu became the sole Centre.

Sergeant (later Captain) Legese Asfaw (member of the Standing Committee and head of the Military Political Affairs Department of the Derg) convened a seminar of the military komisars and cadres in the Military Aviation headquarters (Addis Ababa) from 11 to 18 August 1979 and had them adopt a twenty-four-point resolution concerning mainly the question of the Centre. The relevant part of the resolution stated: "...since it is our leader (the revolutionary and determined Comrade Mengistu Haile-Mariam) who, as the centre, led the revolution from June 28, 1974, to the present hour and minute; even now, since the existence of our revolution is identified with the formation of the Workers' Party through our revolutionary leader as the centre; since there is no alternative to the fact that in the future Comrade Mengistu Haile-Mariam must be the Centre for our Workers' Party; we give our word of honour in the name of the seminar participants that we are prepared to make the

necessary sacrifices required of us by our revolution and our revolutionary leader". The resolution further stated that the revolution reached the stage it did then not because of miracles nor of lack of enemies which had posed danger to it but "because it had on its side the mature, determined and revolutionary leadership of Mengistu Haile-Mariam". In an apparent reference to the members of the leftist political organizations including those that became members of the Joint Front, the resolution said "we know that the clever petit-bourgeoisie who had been hovering to usurp the power of the broad masses would not support, would even oppose, the establishment of the Centre because they know that it is the only instrument by which power would be captured by the workers; we will struggle with the true communists to purge and destroy these anti-Centre and anti-people elements and those like them who may surface in the future."<sup>46</sup>

Mengistu attended the last day of the seminar from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and, in addition to listening to a welcome speech from Sergeant Legese Asfaw, gave the participants "a deep explanation and evaluation of different questions regarding revolutions". It was at the conclusion of the meeting on that day that the twenty-four-point resolution was adopted and read by a representative of the seminar participants in the presence of Mengistu.<sup>47</sup> In the evening of the same day, Mengistu gave a palace dinner to the participants of the seminar in honour of the adoption of the resolution. In his address to the participants on the occasion, he said "The success of the revolution is not due to my wisdom and effort (as the speaker had emphasized) but due to the uprising of the oppressed people and the selfless sacrifices of the army; the credit must go to the army. However, I would like to assure and reassure my readiness to sacrifice everything that is expected from an individual and a fighter". Then, one of the representatives of the seminar participants read yet another eulogy on the theme on how

history had entrusted the leadership of the revolution to Mengistu as of June 1974, i.e. after, according to the speaker, the demise of Haile Sellassie's "period of the man-eater". Finally, Mengistu was given a present on behalf of the komisars and cadres.<sup>48</sup>

As of the next day, the urban dwellers' associations went into full swing mobilizing the city-dwellers into rallies in support of the resolution and messages of congratulations from the various government departments began to pour in. Also, the mass media, rally placards, banners on buildings, street arches, posters in offices, and resolutions of meetings of mass organizations, political study groups and the like, all began echoing the slogan; "forward with the sole leadership of Comrade Mengistu Haile-Mariam".<sup>49</sup>

This is a perfect instance of what came to be known as "organizational operation" (the process by which an inner circle makes a decision and has it adopted by a brow-beaten meeting). In all probability, the twenty-four-point resolution and the speeches made eulogising Mengistu would have in the first place been written by him with the assistance of someone considered literate in the official language (Amharic). Then, some of the would-be participants of the seminar would be appointed to steer the meeting into adopting the resolution and the speeches. Some of them would sit among the audience and advocate and second the right proposals and nominate those to be elected as members of drafting committees and the like; the others would act as the members of the presidium (committee) which would chair and lead the meeting. In such proceedings, the presidium has the choice of either producing the resolution and speeches as though they were its own proposals to be adopted by the assembly or it could have a resolution and speech-drafting committee elected by the assembly to do the job for it. Normally, the participants closely watch the more influential individuals among them ( those appointed to steer the

meeting) and figure out what is expected of them; such decisions are always adopted unanimously. Finally, Mengistu comes and listens to the eulogies and resolutions of the meeting that he had himself written in the first place. No doubt, the idea of the whole exercise is to give the autocratically-made decisions some kind of democratic complexion.

However, this style of Mengistu's government, which appeared manipulative of the komisars and cadres, need not detract from the fact that they were an important political force in their own right; they had been and continued to be a potent power base for the leader they happened to support. The origin of the institution of the komisars and cadres can be traced back to the popular uprising of 1974. It has been noted previously that the activists within the military and police units of the time were, in the summer of that year, transformed into what were called Unit Committees so that they could serve as a bridge between the Derg and the security forces and that, towards the end of the same year, they were disbanded because of their opposition to Derg rule. Starting from 1975, the bulk of the ex-Unit Committee members were sent to the socialist countries for political training and, on their return, were assigned to the various military and police units as political cadres. With the reorganization of the Derg in December, 1976, a Politicization of the Army and Police Commission was set up under the Central Committee of the Derg in order to administer the military komisars and cadres separately from the other cadres.<sup>50</sup> It was this Commission that Sergeant Legese Asfaw was chosen to head in February 1977. According to him, only 6 out of the 28 founder members of the Commission were still with them at the 1979 seminar, suggesting that not many of the original military and police komisars and cadres survived the excesses of the previous years.<sup>51</sup>

The interesting question is why Mengistu fell back on the military komisars and cadres to appoint him as the

Centre which would form the Party subsequently. One alternative open to him would have been his own political organization ( Revolutionary Flame ) of which the komisars and cadres were members. Since the other organizations which were members of the Joint Front had been purged, they could not have been used for the purpose; on the other hand, however, the congress, the central committee or the politburo of Revolutionary Flame could have been called upon to endorse the appointment of Mengistu as the Centre. The explanation appears to have been that, like the other member organizations of the Joint Front, Revolutionary Flame had also incurred the disfavour of Mengistu by insisting on party, as opposed to individual, dictatorship. This appears to have been at the basis of the demand by the members of the Workers' League and Revolutionary Flame to have the administration of the military komisars and cadres transferred from the Military Political Affairs Department (the successor of the Politicization of the Army and Police Commission) to the Joint Front. As indicated in the last section but one, (the demand which was in effect to remove the komisars and cadres from being used as an instrument of personal rule by Mengistu) did not succeed; on the contrary, it led to the rounding up of those who made the demand in the autumn of 1978.

A further instance of the decline of Revolutionary Flame was the provision of the February 1979 Agreement of the member organizations of the Joint Front which stated that the Derg had been the centre of the revolution from its eruption in 1974. In practice, this meant that whereas before the agreement the Derg members were made subordinate to the cadres of the Joint Front and POMOA and received instructions from them, they were now rehabilitated and made superior to the cadres receiving instructions from the central government directly. In fact, the provision of the Agreement affected mainly the cadres of Revolutionary Flame since the other organizations had for all practical purposes fallen by

the wayside. If in effect, Revolutionary Flame had thus not been dissolved at the time of the February agreement, Mengistu's appointment in August as the seed that would germinate and grow into the Party could only have been the final blow to the only organization in existence. From then on, the members of Revolutionary Flame could become members of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia on the strength of their loyalty to Mengistu and not on the strength of their membership of Revolutionary Flame, though as long time supporters of Mengistu and as being known to him more closely than the others, they were probably given priority in the recruitment pecking order.

A more credible alternative to Revolutionary Flame's endorsement of Mengistu's appointment as the Centre would have been the Derg itself. As already noted, the February agreement between the member organizations of the Joint Front had declared that the Derg was the centre of the revolution from its eruption. In fact, this provision seemed to suggest that the agreement had intended the Derg to replace the Joint Front and become the Centre which would recruit the committed Marxist-Leninists and grow into the Party. Moreover, according to the "Constitution" of the Derg, the task of "issuing directives on the establishment of parties..." was entrusted to its Congress.<sup>52</sup> Obviously, this would have made the Derg a more appropriate body to authorize Mengistu to become the Centre that would grow into the Workers' Party. Nevertheless, Mengistu did not wish to use the Derg as the Centre nor to seek its endorsement of his emergence as the sole Centre of the Workers' party.

Thus, by 1979, it is possible to talk of the emergence of three categories of cadres in terms of their importance and relation to the central government. The first of these were those cadres drawn from both the civilian and military sections of the population who had been serving the cause of the "revolution" as members of the five political organizations of the Joint Front, and who had defected to Mengistu's side as their individual

organizations were liquidated. The second were the Derg members who had stayed on the side of Mengistu till 1979 and who had been serving the cause of the revolution as "senior cadres" (as the December 1976 directive which defined their functions characterized them). The third were the military komisars and cadres who were mostly drawn from among the NCOs and who had been serving the cause of revolution as political activists within the various military and police units. Of these, the third category had emerged as the group whose support was most sought after in that they moved among the army and police force, especially among the NCOs and privates, and held the security forces firmly behind the leader they supported. It appears that it was a recognition of this fact that induced Teferi's group to organize and administer them independently from the other cadres under a separate Commission, and that induced Mengistu not only to maintain their independent administration by bringing them under his direct control through the instrumentality of his henchman (Sergeant Legese Asfaw) but also to champion the cause of the NCOs (from which the komisars and cadres were drawn) throughout his political career.

**(F) THE COMMISSION FOR ORGANIZING THE PARTY OF THE  
WORKING PEOPLE OF ETHIOPIA;  
"THE MISSION OF COPWE WILL TRIUMPH."**

The Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE), which was established by Proclamation 174 of December, 1979, was the culmination of the struggle between what were the "pro-Derg" political organizations and the central government in the context of the Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs (POMOA) and of the Joint Front of Ethiopian Marxist - Leninist Organizations (JFEMLO). Article 18 of the Proclamation provided that the sources of income of COPWE were to consist of the contributions of its members and "other sources". The reference to "other sources" obviously meant government

sources since the Commission appropriated the best government buildings in the country and fleets of government cars for its services. Further, being duly established by a Proclamation of the Derg, it would certainly be the case that a budgetary allocation from the treasury would have been at its disposal. Thus, like JFEMLO, the Commission had the character of being a voluntary association of individuals dependent for its activities on the contribution of its members; moreover, like POMOA, it had the character of being a government agency created by a Proclamation and funded by the treasury.

Furthermore, the Commission inherited the tasks of organizing a "strong party of the working people based on the teachings of Marxism-Leninism" from JFEMLO and of disseminating Marxism-Leninism among organizations and the masses from POMOA. Sub-article 1 of Article 6 of the Proclamation then broke down these functions of the Commission into 15 items and in its sub-article 2 entrusted them to the chairman (Mengistu Haile-Mariam) by stating: "The chairman of COPWE who shall have all the powers and duties of COPWE as enumerated in Sub-article 1 of this Article shall implement or cause the implementation of the same". There exists here a parallel between the natures of the trinities, on the one hand, and that of Mengistu and COPWE, on the other; the difference between the two lies in that in the case of the former, it is three in one, whereas in the case of the latter, it is two in one. Interestingly enough, Article 4 provided that the Commission was accountable to the Derg; however, if the arguments of Chapter 6 above are granted, Mengistu and the Derg were also one and the same. Housed in an extension of the Grand Palace in which Mengistu, like the monarchs before him, resided, the head office of COPWE became the centre of authority from where all ultimate government and party power flowed.

It took COPWE four years (until September 1984) to recruit its members, construct its organs, rechristen itself "the Workers' Party of Ethiopia" and dub its chairman "the General Secretary of WPE" and its Executive Committee "the politburo of WPE". In other words, there was no real difference between COPWE and WPE; the members and organs of the Commission were the members and organs of the Party; what took place in September, 1984, was a characteristically wasteful fanfare to mark the rechristening of the organization.

Beyond stating that lower organs<sup>53</sup> of the Commission could nominate candidates to higher organs<sup>54</sup> and beyond stating that the chairman would issue the recruitment rules for members and candidates, the Proclamation is not helpful in explaining how members were to be recruited. It is common knowledge, however, that, for the duration of the Commission, the chairman personally interviewed candidates and signed their membership cards though individuals recruited as of then do not seem to have met the chairman. The number of members of neither the Commission nor the Party has ever been made public. A report of the Central Statistical Office of 1987 put the composition of the membership as follows: workers 37.8 percent, farmers 32.3 percent, civil servants 20 percent, and others 9.9 percent.<sup>55</sup> The proportion of workers and farmers appears to have been exaggerated beyond bounds mainly because of the felt need to make WPE sound like a Leninist party. In fact, as its name indicates, the mandate of COWPE was to organize the party of the "working people of Ethiopia" which was understood to mean a party based on that section of the population which lived off its own sweat and which in effect would exclude those who lived on the labour of others. When the party was established in 1984, however, it was declared to be not the "party of the working people of Ethiopia" but "the Workers Party of Ethiopia". Obviously, the idea behind this was the desire to confer a vanguard role to the industrial workers and to subsume

under their vanguardship the other progressive classes like the peasants and other sections of the population who had, as the jargon of the time had it, "betrayed" their class and accepted Marxism-Leninism as their ideology. Be that as it may, the same report of the Central Statistical office put the figure of the working class for 1985 at 271,233 in the then total population of about 45 million.<sup>56</sup> If the figure for the industrial work force looks small, it is not for lack of emphasis; in fact, even that figure appears to have been multiplied at least by a factor of two.

The General Assembly, which represents the membership of the Party by such quotas as the chairman deems appropriate, meets under the leadership of the chairman as often as is specified by internal regulations of the Commission or when the chairman convenes it.<sup>57</sup> Though it is authorized to make recommendations regarding "domestic and foreign policy", approve internal regulations and programmes, comment and make recommendations on "important matters" concerning the Commission when referred to it by the chairman,<sup>58</sup> The General Assembly has met too infrequently to make any difference on any of these questions. At any rate, even when it met, it has never gone beyond listening to the reports of the chairman and expressing its approval of them through standing ovations.

The other organ of the Commission-Party is the Central Committee, the members of which the Chairman was authorized to "select, assign, transfer, suspend or dismiss...."<sup>59</sup> Certain individuals, like members of the Derg, were selected to become members of the Central Committee of COPWE almost from the inception of that Commission; however, it was not until *(later that the full membership of the Committee was* made public. At the time, it was reported in the official daily (Addis Zemen) that the members numbered 136 and the alternate members 64. Thus, the total number of members and alternate members of that

organ was 200, a figure which included the members and alternate members of the politbureau who were also members of the Central Committee. Of these, a quarter to a half were drawn from the army and the rest from the upper civilian bureaucracy. Further, women were represented on the Central Committee by one member and three alternate members.<sup>60</sup> Though the Proclamation provides for a long list of functions that the Central Committee has to carry out in accordance with the directives of the Chairman,<sup>61</sup> its role has been limited to meeting a few times a year and, like the General Assembly, expressing its approval of the Chairman's reports through a standing ovation.

Yet another organ was the Executive Committee or politbureau, the members of which were again to be selected, assigned, transferred, suspended or dismissed by the Chairman.<sup>62</sup> Upon the establishment of the Commission, 7 members of the Derg's Standing Committee were selected to become members of the Executive Committee of COPWE and on the establishment of WPE, the same individuals, in addition to 4 civilian members and 6 alternate members, became members of the politbureau. The Executive Committee was given a number of relatively unimportant functions by the Proclamation. Nevertheless, since, as noted earlier, all the powers of COPWE were entrusted to the chairman, the Executive Committee could only act as an assistant to the chairman in his exercise of powers. In fact, the relationship between the Chairman and the Executive Committee was exactly the same as the relationship between him and the Standing Committee of the Derg (as discussed in Chapter 6 above); the only difference now was that, since the Executive Committee had taken the place of the Standing Committee as of the establishment of COPWE, both governmental and party powers were concentrated in the latter body and (if the arguments of chapter 6 are granted) those powers were concentrated in the Chairman.

Around the time of the formation of COPWE, members of the armed forces and the Police who became party functionaries, including members of the Executive Committee-politbureau were declared to be civilians and were in effect referred to only as "comrades". When the Party was established in September, 1984, the members and the alternate members of the politbureau were the following comrades: Mengistu Haile-Mariam (General Secretary), Fikra Selassie Wog-Deres, Fisiha Desta, General Tesfaye Gebre-Kidan (Minister of Defence), Birihanu Baye, Addis Tedla, Legese Asfaw, Hailu Yemenu, Amanuel Wolde-Michael, Alemu Abebe, Shimelis Mazengya, Teka Tulou, Fisiha Sidelil, Shoan-Dagn Belete, Tesfaye Dinka, Tesfaye Wolde-Selassie and Kassa Gebrae.

In addition to the General Assembly, the Central Committee and the Politburo, the Commission-Party had what the Proclamation called Regional Committees at the provincial, Awraja and Wereda levels and at the level of each organization.<sup>63</sup> These were branch offices of the Party's Central Committee (secretariat at the national level) which is headed by the General Secretary and which also had committees as described above and departments for different spheres of activities like departments for Organizational Affairs, Military Political Affairs, Propaganda, Economics and Foreign Affairs. Some of these departments were duplicated in the regional committees. Unlike members of the organs of the Party, most of whom were employed in the government departments, those assigned in the regional committees were full-time party functionaries.

By the early 1980's, the administrative relationship between the lower and upper organs of the government and mass organizations was declared to be governed by the Leninist principle of "democratic-centralism" but this was not so for the relationships between the regional committees of the Party. Instead, it was provided that the Central Committee would prescribe the directives governing "the chain of command, the procedure of

submitting reports and similar activities".<sup>64</sup> Further, the Law does not give the regional committees any powers of decision-making; it only allows them to agitate among Party members and the masses of the people, nominate candidates to higher organs, resolutely struggle against factionalism, implement correctly and without delay decisions of superior organs, and hold meetings in order to "discuss" and submit "recommendations" to superior organs.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, it is a common complaint of the party functionaries that they have no decision-making powers, that their recommendations are never acted on, and that they have no way of finding out the real reasons behind policies adopted by the central body concerning such important matters as villagization, resettlement and the civil wars, an omission which greatly handicaps their agitational work among the people. The regional committees and their functionaries are, more than anything else, a means of reporting to the central authority about "factionalists and other anti-people" tendencies among themselves;<sup>66</sup> and about similar tendencies in government and non-government organizations. Similarly, the regional committees are a machinery through which all the members of the party discharge their responsibility of resolutely "exposing anti-revolution and anti-unity" activities.<sup>67</sup> Thus, the individual party member submits a daily report to the basic organization or to the Wereda secretariat concerning whatever "anti-revolution and anti-unity" activities he comes across in his work place, residence or anywhere else he thinks it exists.

Further, there is the relationship between the Commission-Party, on the one hand, and the government and non-government organizations on the other. In this regard, the Proclamation provided that "any natural or juridical person, government office, government or mass organization shall have the duty to cooperate with COPWE in all its activities to implement the purposes of this Proclamation".<sup>68</sup> This gave rise to a tremendous amount

of confusion among the regional committees and government departments regarding their respective jurisdictions. This was so no less among the ministries and the Addis Ababa Regional Committee of the Party which was given the status of a provincial regional office.<sup>69</sup> The ministers felt that, being in charge of spheres of activities at the national level, they should come under the Central Committee and not under the Provincial Committee. Further, though they had the duty to cooperate with the Party and the latter had the right of giving them "directives" the question of delimiting the boundaries between "decisions" and "directives" was not always an easy one to make. In fact, the resulting confusion was used by Party functionaries to accuse those of the government officials they did not like of being "anti-revolutionary" and to victimize them. After a number of years of confusion, its continued decline was arrested by absorbing all the officials into Party membership. Nevertheless, a government official would ignore a Party directive (acknowledged as such by the central authorities) at his own peril.

The non-government organizations which also have the duty to cooperate with COPWE were what came to be known as the mass organizations including the Peasant Association, Urban Dwellers' Association, the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association, the Revolutionary Ethiopian Youth Association, the All Ethiopian Trade Unions, and the professional associations like those of the doctors, nurses and teachers. The most important of these were the first two which, since their establishment in 1975, were expanded organizationally to embrace the entire population except the nomads and those under guerrilla control. For example, it was reported that in 1985, there were 20,367 basic peasant associations embracing 5,681,033 heads of families as members and that in 1986, there were 1,258 basic urban dwellers' associations embracing all of the urban population as members.<sup>70</sup>

The basic organizations of the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association and the Revolutionary Ethiopian Youth Association were subordinated to the basic peasants' and urban dwellers' associations and, hence, brought under the leadership of the latter two mass organizations. In addition, they were subordinated to their own higher bodies which were established at the Wereda, Awraja provincial and national levels. The All Ethiopian Trade Unions and the professional associations, on the other hand, were established independently from the peasants and urban dwellers associations. This has meant that almost every citizen belonged to one mass organization or another, and often he belonged to more than one organization at the same time. A young lady between the age of 18 to 30, for instance, would automatically be a member of either the peasants' association or urban dwellers' association (depending on whether she lived in the countryside or an urban area), and of the Revolutionary Youth Association; further, she could be a member of the All Ethiopian Trade Unions, the nurses'-doctors' associations and of the Party.

Though (as explained in chapter 4 above) the Peasants' Associations and Urban Dwellers' Associations had extensive powers over social and economic matters at the time of their formation in 1975, and this was further expanded by Law later, it was their political functions that survived the eventful years following their establishment in 1975. An outstanding example of their political function was the role they played in harassing, detaining and eliminating members of the various political organizations during the red terror. Since then, the Urban Dwellers' Associations lost their control over house rents and with it their ability to promote social and economic activities in their localities like building communal toilets, communal water-taps, small roads, kindergartens and poultry rearing. This left them with the tasks, when asked to so by the centre, of mobilizing the population, hunting the youth for military

service, pressurizing the population into conformity through the threat of withdrawing shopping rations and through refusing to write references without which many organizations including the Immigration Office were prohibited from providing their services, and co-ordinating contributions for the war effort or for the drought affected people.

The Peasants' Associations have been even more important than the Urban Dwellers' Associations in the implementation of policies of the government and of the Party. Apart from the fact that they wield the same powers over their members as do the Urban Dwellers' Associations over their's, they have in addition been involved in grand national projects of the government-Party. For example, they have been instrumental in allocating and collecting from their members grain quotas to be sold to the government at below market prices (the so-called quota system), in mobilizing hundreds and thousands of peasants in the drought affected areas of the north for settlement in southern regions hundreds of miles away from their homesteads (so-called resettlement), and in herding millions of peasants into villages from their pre-existing scattered hamlets (so-called villagization).

#### CONCLUSION

Having had himself declared the "sole leader" by the military cadres, Mengistu then became COPWE and personally constructed the WPE by recruiting members and by appointing some among them as members and functionaries of higher organs of the Party. Then, the government and non-government organizations were subordinate to the Party, generally speaking, for two purposes: to help the central authority control society and to help in the implementation of its policies. As chairman of the Derg, Mengistu Haile-Mariam was the absolute head of government; in addition, as General Secretary of the Party, he became head of WPE after the

establishment of the latter. Whichever hat he decided to wear at any given time, Mengistu emerged the absolute central authority whose policies, (adopted by the Politburo willy-nilly) were implemented by the totality of the body politic and on whose behalf society was controlled.

Often, observers of the Ethiopian political scene talk of the mobilization of the lower class and its incorporation into the political life of the country for the first time ever without much reference as to whether the mass of the people are incorporated into democratic government and party processes or whether they are incorporated into a totalitarian system. There is no doubt that either of those contingencies would constitute a radical departure from the past; nonetheless, it appears appropriate to query whether the incorporation was a democratic or a dictatorial one since there is a qualitative difference between the two. Viewed from the perspective of the participation of the newly created party and mass organizations in the implementation of policies, it could be argued that the new order allows the masses a degree of democratic participation in the political life of the country. This argument is in itself very weak in that an animal which is trained to perform certain activities through the use of sticks and carrots cannot be claimed to have had its consciousness taken into account by its master. Moreover, the participation of the masses in controlling themselves can only be taken as evidence of the emergence of totalitarianism.

At any rate, a Leninist party is not known for its democratic disposition towards the masses of the people. However, it is interesting to ask whether there are various degrees of democratic traditions within the Leninist ruling parties themselves, whether, for example, there was a degree of vitality and free debate within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union even at the time of Stalin which enabled it to evolve a whole set of new

ideas concerned with social engineering (five year plans, new forms of social and economic organizations, a new legal system) and to constantly revise them with a view to making innovations. This does not appear to have been the case in Ethiopia. Given the elimination of all political organizations (including those which seemed willing to cooperate with the centre), the highly personalized nature of the construction of the government and party machinery, and given Mengistu's ability and will to bulldoze his wishes through the Politburo, the Central Committee and the General Assembly, it would seem logical to conclude that no degree of pluralism (even when that pluralism was within the accepted bounds of Marxism-Leninism in practice) has been possible in Ethiopia. Except in its military-like command structure the new political order distinguished itself by a withered party, government and mass organizational machinery aped from a foreign model. When, after February 1977 and especially after the summer of 1979, Mengistu as much as developed a fever, the whole of Ethiopia was seized with a spasmodic convulsion of sneezes, a convulsion which evaporates into oblivion within a month or two only to be stirred thereafter by another round of fever, cold and sneezes for a month or two only to completely forget it and turned its attention towards a new policy in the next round of fever, cold and sneezes.

## FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

1. Article 47 of the 1955 Revised Constitution of Ethiopia.
2. Though some individuals expressed their disapproval of party politics in private, they were never organized nor had any underground publications to advocate their point of view.
3. Article 29 of the 1974 Draft Constitution of Ethiopia.
4. The Programme of Ethiopian Socialism of December 20, 1974.
5. "AESM is Dismissed From The Joint Front of Marxist - Leninist Organizations", Voice of Unity, Vol. 1, No. 4, April 1978, p. 10.
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52. Article 5 (7) of Proclamation No. 110, 1977.
53. Article 14 (5) (c) of Proclamation No. 174, 1979.
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57. Article 11 (1) of Proclamation No. 174, 1979.
57. Article 11 (1) of Proclamation No. 174, 1979.
58. Article 11 (3) of Proclamation No. 174, 1979.
59. Article 10 (2) (c) of Proclamation No. 174, 1979.
60. "The Electoral Results of WPE's Central Committee and Politburo are Made Public", Addis Zemen, September 11, 1984; and, THE ETHIOPIAN HERALD, JUNE 25, 1980.
61. Article 12 of Proclamation No. 174, 1979.
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66. Article 14 (5) of Proclamation No. 174, 1979.
67. Article 14 (5) (g) of Proclamation No. 174, 1979.
68. Article 8 (8) of Proclamation No. 174, 1979.
69. Article 17 of Proclamation No. 174, 1979.
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## CHAPTER NINE

### CONCLUSION

This chapter is primarily concerned with examining the causes and outcomes of the revolution from the perspective of contemporary social science research. It begins with a section which summarizes the main findings of the previous chapters. The summary is followed by other sections intended to develop aspects of the causes and outcomes considered to be controversial and important in explaining the revolution.

#### (A) SUMMARY

The collapse of the old-state was brought about by structural crisis induced by the centralization, modernization and territorial consolidation drive of the monarchy and by the post-war changes in the international scene. Centralization gave rise to the emergence of a highly centralized autocracy which made itself increasingly irrelevant to a democratizing society; modernization to a new elite which became increasingly vocal in its opposition to the obsolete monarchy; and, territorial consolidation to a more diversified population which became more and more difficult to govern. The international dynamic further weakened the state by providing alternative political models to the new elite, weapons and diplomatic support to regionalist insurgents and by imposing economic relations inimical to development. While structural crisis is believed to have played the crucial role in weakening the old-state, it is, perhaps, complimentary. Structural crisis can be seen as having prepared the ground for the 1974 action of the revolutionary social groups. The harassment of the old-state through strikes, demonstrations and petitions coordinated by the steering committees that sprang up in

the corporate groups in the course of the uprising of 1974 cannot be fully explained without resort to conscious action on the part of the partisans.

During the uprising, it was the organized social group like the security forces, the students, teachers, civil servants and workers that were most active. When the old-state collapsed in September, however, it was some 106 junior officers, NCO's and privates who, after having formed a committee called "Derg", took power in the name of the security forces. They did this to the exclusion of all the civilian corporate groups. Feeling left out in the cold, the groups especially CELU, the students unions and the teachers associations, put up resistance to the Derg's monopoly of power in the subsequent years.

Starting from the summer of 1974, however, various political organizations came to the surface and assumed the leadership role of the opposition. Some of these like the left wing EPRP and the right wing EDU continued their opposition until they were crushed by the Derg starting from 1977. Similar organized resistance to Derg rule came from regionalist insurgents; EPRP and EDU formed de facto coalitions with the regionalist organizations in the course of their common struggle against the Derg. Some of the pan-Ethiopian organizations other than EPRP and EDU came to the side of the Derg from the time of their establishment and the remaining sided with it later. These, all of which were left wing, included AESM, the Workers League, EOPRS, EMLRO and Revolutionary Flame. They formed a coalition with Mengistu's faction within the Derg which emerged victorious in February 1977, and monopolized power. The five political groups which had been working with the faction fell out with it between the summers of 1977 and 1979 leaving Mengistu Haile-Mariam and his close associates to construct the party and government structures on their own.

The chances were that left to its devices, in other words left without the challenge posed by the other political organizations, the Derg would not have gone beyond the achievement of a mere coup d'état. It is believed that it was the political organizations, which were dominated by members of the intermediate social strata, and the complex interplay between them that gave birth to the particular kinds of outcomes or transformations that followed in the wake of the collapse of the ancien regime.

One of the first and most fundamental transformations achieved in the course of 1975 was the nationalization of business organizations, rural and urban land, and extra houses. The achievement of those transformations was a result of the concession made by the Derg to the demands of the civilian left. These reforms, coupled with the establishment of a central planning machinery in 1978, laid the foundation to a "socialist" economic system in Ethiopia. It is believed that such an economic system was not more productive than the pre-capitalist order that prevailed prior to the revolution nor more than an economic system that might have been brought about by a middle class revolution.

The second important transformation was the change in social structures introduced by the same legislations of 1975 which announced the nationalization measures. These had the effect of dispossessing the upper class of its assets in land, property, and business organizations and of bringing about a great levelling down of society. In addition, those legislations provided for the organization of the entire population into peasant associations and urban dwellers associations which, as arenas of struggle between the political organizations in the ensuing years became increasingly centralized, politicised and armed. In fact, the mobilization of the rural population and its incorporation into the new polity is one of the most striking achievements of the revolution. The most important effect, in the political

sphere, of the mobilization and incorporation of the population was the laying down of the bases for the control of the whole of society by the party-state.

The third transformation relates to the adoption of a new ideology. In December 1974, the Derg issued "Ethiopian Socialism" by way of meeting half way the clamour of the civilian left for the adoption of the Marxist-Leninist programmes. However, Ethiopian Socialism was rejected by the leftist political organizations on the ground that there is only one kind of socialism, namely Marxism-Leninism, and that, whatever else it might be, Ethiopian Socialism is not such an ideology. In the course of 1975, the Derg fell under the sway of the leftist political organizations with the result that, in April 1976, it adopted NDRPE as the official ideology of Ethiopia. The NDRP is the socio-economic and political programme that Soviet Marxists prescribe as the appropriate policy for pre-capitalist societies to pursue. Much of the leftist literature questions the sincerity of the Derg in adopting the Programme. The question of whether Derg members really believe in the ideology or not is in a way rather academic. Whatever the merits, the new ideology has in practice been important in influencing the nature of the reforms that were adopted by the new regime. It has brought into existence "socialist" programmes like shift of alliances from the west to the east, central planning and a Leninist party.

The fourth transformation concerned the important change in the nature of the government itself. Despite the radical socio-economic and ideological reforms of 1975 and 1976, the conflict over power between the various civilian political organization continued to intensify and to divide members of the Derg among sympathisers of one organization or another. Between July 1976 and February 1977, Mengistu, backed by a faction within the Derg and by the five leftist groups, carried out palace coups against other Derg factions and

emerged as the unchallenged autocrat. In effect, this meant that power passed from monarchical autocratic control to a collective control by the Derg till the beginning of 1975 and then by an officers' junta within the Derg and finally reverted back to an autocratic control.

In this sense, the re-emergence of autocracy can be seen as a continuation of Ethiopia's political culture, and hence, not a transformation. However, the similarity between the two governments rests on the fact that they are both dictatorships. On the other hand, however, Mengistu's autocracy is more modern, more determined and stronger than its predecessor. This ~~of~~ so because it has mobilized the population into social institutions and laid an elaborate network of administrative, intelligence and party structures with the help of which it controls and guides society and pursues its policies more vigorously than ever before. The difference is between a paternalistic traditional aristocratic autocracy and a ruthless 20th century totalitarian autocracy. X

The fifth transformation concerned the struggle against counter-revolutionary forces and shift of international alliances. By the time Mengistu assumed dictatorial powers in February 1977, Ethiopia had been engulfed by regionalist as well as domestic and international counter-revolutionary wars backed by the conservative states of the Middle East. Particularly important in this regard was the invasion of Ethiopia in July 1977 by the Republic of Somalia which was an ally of the socialist countries. These created tremendous pressures on the new regime forcing it to seek urgent international assistance. The fact that the Derg had adopted "scientific Socialism" as the official ideology and the emergence as victorious of Mengistu's faction which was believed to have been pro-Moscow, had brought about closer relations between Ethiopia and the socialist countries. One of the results of this was the delivery of a modest amount of tanks, armed cars and other weapons

in June 1977 with the help of which the regime was able to crush EDU forces in the summer of 1977 and curtail the activities of Eritrean insurgents. However, the relationship with the socialist countries was not consummated until the end of that year. Feeling aggrieved by the reluctance of the Socialist countries to continue to supply her with weapons and by suspicion that they were collaborating with Ethiopia and hoping to attract western aid, Somalia unilaterally terminated diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and Cuba in October thus opening the way for further collaboration between Ethiopia and the socialist countries.

Despite the fact that so much is made of the strategic importance of Ethiopia, the impact of the shift of alliances on the bipolar security system is minimal if at all. On the other hand, the massive delivery of weapons received from the Soviet Union and the troops provided by Cuba were certainly important in enabling Ethiopia to achieve quick victories against the counter-revolutionary forces of EDU, ALF and the Republic of Somalia. Also, those victories were a tremendous boost to the new regime. Given the size of its population, however, it is likely that Ethiopia would in the long run have prevailed over those forces. Further, the shift of alliances was important in characterizing Ethiopia as one of the "anti-imperialist" third world states following the non-capitalist path of development with all that it implies to her economic relations with the west and east.

The sixth and final transformation was the creation of a Leninist party. Soon after his emergence as an all powerful leader in February 1977, Mengistu launched the Red Terror against EPRP and managed to crush it before the year was out. Similarly, between the summers of 1977 and 1979, he crushed the five organizations that were working in close collaboration with him and his faction within the Derg. This effectively purged from government and social institutions cadres and members of the political organizations including those of Mengistu's

own creation (Revolutionary Flame). The liquidation of the members of the contending political organizations opened the way for their replacement in the government and mass organizations by cadres loyal to him and his close associates personally. In this way, the ground was prepared for Mengistu to personally interview and recruit members of the party, appoint the Central Committee and politburo members and launch WPE in 1984. As a Leninist party, the importance of WPE lay above all in serving as an instrument for controlling government and social institutions as well as society at large.

#### **(B) THE EMERGENCE OF A REVOLUTIONARY CRISIS**

The first three chapters above deal with the revolutionary situation in Ethiopia which led to a politico-military crisis in early 1974 opening the way for a protest movement of the urban population and culminating in the collapse of the ancien regime in September 1974. It is the central thesis of the first chapter that the emergence of the revolutionary crisis was, above all, the result of Ethiopia's absorption into the European political system which had been taking place over a long period of time. In other words, in response to European expansionism, the monarch pursued a reasonably successful programme of territorial consolidation, centralization and modernization from the late 19th century which gave birth to a sovereign state, a highly centralized autocracy and a new elite. Starting from 1960, however, developments in the domestic and international scenes began rendering the absolutist monarchy obsolete.

First, there emerged regional movements in the Ogaden, Bale and Eritrea which were opposed to the central government on religious, linguistic and political grounds. These movements which were based among the predominantly Islamic communities of those regions were able to receive material and diplomatic support from the

countries of the Middle East which sought to liberate their co-religionists from the Ethiopian Christian state. Juxtaposed against the Middle East was the African subsystem which lent its support to the Ethiopian state over the regional question but only on the diplomatic front. Further, the cold war meant that while Ethiopia threw in her lot with the west to ward off Middle Eastern pressures on the regional question, at the same time she laid herself open to the hostility from the East. Thus Ethiopia's domestic problems over the regional question coupled with the emergence of the Middle East and Africa into the state-system and the emergence of the bi-polar security system in the post World War II era not only posed a danger to country's territorial integrity but also to the credibility of the state.

Second, from 1960 onwards, there emerged an increasingly militant opposition against the monarchy among the partisans of the modern sector. In December of that year, there was an abortive coup d'état which demystified the monarchy and subjected it to rational scrutiny and criticism in the subsequent years. The army which had put down the abortive coup and which later bore the brunt of the onslaught of the regional insurgents became restive and felt free to demand pay increases from the monarch as and when it wished. As the number of those in the modern sector grew in the 1960's as a result of an accelerated expansion of the bureaucracy and the industrial work force, and as the partisans became organized into students' unions, teachers' associations, trade unions and professional associations, they became increasingly politicized and militant.

Despite its numerical insignificance in relation to the size of the population, the political impact of the new elite (the military and civilian bureaucracies in particular) was substantial; this is not surprising, since it had taken over the military and administrative functions of the traditional elite with the result that the monarchy had become more dependent on it. Though the

new elite was the product of the modernizing drive of the monarchy which it had, under European influence, been pursuing for a long time, the allegiance of that class was no longer to the traditional institutions of the country but to European ideologies and political processes. Moreover, the opposition at the centre and on the peripheries had a tendency to reinforce each other's sentiments against the monarchy: not only did the civilians and regional insurgents become ideologically closer to one another over time but also the army was pinned down by the insurgents in the arid and semi-arid regions adding to its grievances against the state.

Third, two aspects of transnational economic transactions appear to be relevant to the popular uprising of 1974. The first is the fact that Ethiopia's cyclical drought was made worse in the 1960's and 1970's by a population explosion brought on by the intervention of modern medicine (malaria control, antibiotics, health centres and the like) made available mainly through bilateral and multilateral arrangements. The impact of demographic factors on ecology (like forests and rain fall) are clear enough. This, coupled with the subsistence agrarian economy, gave rise to the food crisis of 1973 and 1974 which greatly discredited the ancien regime in the eyes of its critics both at home and abroad.

The other aspect of the transnational economic transaction is the north-south divide. Despite the presumed specialization of the north in manufactures and of the south in commodities, it is obvious that the deteriorating terms of trade for the third world countries have militated against the poor countries spearheading their development drive through exports. Ethiopia's ability to export agricultural products (the commodities of special interest to her) is barred by the mountains and lakes of temperate agricultural surpluses. Further, coffee, Ethiopia's main export earner, has, since the early 1960's, been subject to the regime of the

International Coffee Agreement according to which she can export the commodity only in the amount of quota allocated to her. Her ability to vary the size of the quota is greatly restricted by competition with more important third world producers of coffee. Consequently, the incentive to increase the production of the commodity with a view to exchanging it for weapons, luxury items or capital goods, as the case may be, is restricted.

As a result, like all third world governments, the ancien regime may have been too constrained by these international factors to be able to do much about development; however, its critics would attribute any lack of development to its ineptitude. It is submitted that the broad spectrum of international economic transactions (and not the international capitalist system understood in the sense of foreign private capital) must go some way in explaining the frequency of revolutions in the third world and also in constituting one of the causal structural dimensions responsible for the emergence in Ethiopia of the revolutionary crisis of 1974.

Fourth, the state which was operating in the 20th century within the constraints of this domestic and international ecology was comparable to the reforming but at the same time decaying absolutist monarchies of Europe of past centuries. As discussed in chapter 4 above, its policy of modernization had produced a tiny capitalist enclave in the industrial and agricultural sectors. Apart from the fact that the latter was dominated by foreign investors, the development of industries and commercial farms came rather late, in the early and late 1960's, respectively. A more important effect of the modernizing drive of the monarchy was the fact that it had destroyed its traditional base of authority (the aristocratic class of warriors) and replaced it by the petit bourgeoisie (civilian and military bureaucrats, white collar workers, teachers and students) who became opposed to it. Like the traditional base which it

destroyed, the monarchy belonged to a different age and was therefore, unfit to govern a society in which participation of broader sections of the population in the political life of the country was becoming increasingly important. It surrounded itself by the residual aristocrats and cut itself off from society; it was extremely autocratic and refused to devolve power to the new elite; its style of administration (divide and rule) was divisive of the new elite and precluded the emergence of a credible alternative source of authority which would appeal to those in the modern sector.

To crown it all, the monarch (Haile Selassie) with so much power in his hands was, by 1974, too old and senile to exercise his authority in any meaningful way. By the same year, the monarchy was so discredited by all these trends that its benefactor (the US) had started demoting its relations with Ethiopia substantially in order to avoid being identified with the ancien regime. When the uprising came, the high dignitaries, who had lost the leadership of the monarch were too divided among themselves to make a difference.

These perspectives of world-time, international structures, geopolitics, state and social structures may go a good deal of the way in explaining the decline and decay of the ancien regime but they do not directly deal with the question of why the urban population rose up in a spontaneous uprising in 1974 as discussed in chapter 2 above. When an old-state is in such a state of decay, all that is needed to light a revolt is a mere spark like the denial to the soldiers and NCO's of access to the water well of Negele which led to a mutiny and arrest of the officers there in January; the oil price increases that led to the demonstration of Addis Ababa taxi owners in February; the sector review that brought the teachers out on strike in the same month; or the devastation of the hidden 1973-1974 drought; the discovery of which led to the protests of the students and intellectuals at the same time. Such sparks (like the student demonstrations

and rallies) had been taking place for the previous decade. However, they did not light a big fire as did the sparks of 1974 mainly because they were contained by the police and military force of the state.

It is believed that on balance social order is not predicated on consent of the ruled that the latter can withdraw at will (as the liberal tradition would have it) so much as on coercion, an instrument which the ancien regime lost as a result of the structural crisis described in the previous paragraphs. In other words, the popular uprising of 1974 was possible not because those who took part in it were discontented with the old order as because the ancien regime was too weak to control even its cities.

The revolt of the urban population cannot be fully explained by reference to its relations with the state only but also by its internal structures. In this regard, the fact that the members of the urban population lived in close proximity to one another, that they were organized into unions and associations of all descriptions and that they were, in addition, able to organize spontaneous steering committees in their places of work are all relevant. Chapter 2 above gives emphasis to this ability of the urban population to organize and its ability therefore to prepare endless petitions and co-ordinate strikes, demonstrations, and rallies and in this way harass the government. Perhaps, the absence of similar structures among the rural population goes to explain to a degree why they also did not rise up in revolt at the time of the popular uprising. By the same token, the superior organisational structure of the military and its access to the resources of the state goes to explain why it, as opposed to the other urban groups, was finally able to replace the ancien regime.

While it is proper to emphasise the structural approach, there is still the need to take into account the role of will. Strikes, demonstrations and rallies would have been unimaginable a few decades earlier; the

environment for such actions was created only with increased industrialization and urbanization. Moreover, it is believed that such actions were guided by the will or belief systems of the actors, belief systems that grew with industrialization and urbanization and (as argued in chapter 1 above) belief systems directly emulated from abroad. Particularly relevant in this regard was the educational system pursued by the country, the expatriate teachers, the library facilities, and the training of members of the military and civilian elite abroad. All these were effective channels through which western ideas like Marxism were imported and propagated particularly among those who emerged out of the crisis of 1974 as the agents of the revolution. It appears that the international dynamic was relevant not only in influencing the actions of the state but also those of certain sections of the population even when the impact of the transnational on a given society takes place over the head of the state.

It is believed that the above international and domestic constraints and opportunities within which the old state and the new elite had to operate are relevant in explaining the emergence of the revolutionary crisis in Ethiopia but they are by no means the only approaches that have been applied to the question.

One of these is the classical Marxian class concept of society within a given state according to which the exploited lower classes revolt and overthrow the surplus appropriating upper classes. The official rhetoric is replete with this exposition of the old order and of the 1974 uprising; the rhetoric of the leftist political groups often slides into it.

However, as argued in Chapter 2, the exploited peasantry did not take part in the uprising; the role of the industrial workers in the uprising was not any more militant than any of the other groups including the church and mosque clergy. Rather it was the army, teachers, students and the white collar leaders of the

trade unions who played a more active role than the other groups. In fact, it may boldly be stated that in the context of Ethiopia, to be a worker is not to be exploited so much as to be privileged: it is to have a regular income, however little, and to have access to health services and schools which were not, on the whole, available to the unemployed or to the peasants. However, privilege does not seem to be a guarantee against revolt since it is the more privileged (the petit-bourgeoisie) who were more active in the uprising than any other sections of the population. Conversely, exploitation which characterized the Ethiopian society since time immemorial does not appear to be a recipe for revolt. There were certainly rivalries among the petitbourgeoisie at the time of the uprising - for example between the higher and lower employees of government departments or between the junior and senior officers - but these cannot be sensibly equated with class divisions. At any rate, in the post-Lenin period, Marxist intellectuals have abandoned the phenomena of intra-national class exploitation as a valid causal explanation of revolution.

Closely related to this is the theory of structuralist Marxism according to which transnational capital flows destabilize the existing social and political order and cause the overthrow of the old-state. As documented amply in chapters 3, 5, and 7, this was the central rhetorical point of the left wing political organisations including most notable EPRP and AESM as well as that of the regime as reflected by their common juxtaposing of classes into imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic-capitalism, on one hand, and the workers and peasants, on the other.<sup>1</sup> Of the serious authors on the Ethiopian revolution, Markakis and Nega Ayele were the first to offer a version of this theory. They argue that the alliance between the Ethiopian ruling class and international capital (an alliance forged by the former's encouragement of foreign investment) precluded the emergence of an indigenous middle class (and incidental

the possibility of a middle class revolution). They explain that the state's intervention on behalf of capital in taking drastic measures against workers' restiveness made them militant; that the domination of the modern sector by foreign capital narrowed the social horizon of the educated petit-bourgeoisie by barring its way from emerging as a middle class and reducing it to employee status; and that the control of large scale trade blocked the emergence of the self-employed petitbourgeoisie (the lower mercantile class) into a middle class. This, they argue, was the reason why the petit-bourgeoisie (including the students who prepared the ground for revolution by politicising land reform and the exploitation of workers by the alliance of the ruling class with international capital) joined the workers and peasants in 1974.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the work of Halliday and Molyneux, which is much richer in the structures it considers, argues on this point, that the main social impact of exogenous capital was on the state machinery itself, on the civil servants including the teachers and army officers who were most exposed to alternative ideas and political models. They maintain that this was because the civil servants and students came from an intermediate social strata.<sup>3</sup>

These authors were right in choosing the petit bourgeoisie and, to a lesser extent, the working class as the main target of the influence of penetrating capital since these were the classes that were most active in the popular uprising. On the other hand, the impact of penetrating capital is portrayed by these authors predominantly as acting on the cognitive state of the consciousness of these classes without acknowledging what they are doing, they thus transform what is intended to be an economic explanation into a purposive one. Moreover, as noted earlier, an exogenously stimulated capitalist relation is not the only nor the most important source of political consciousness nor of

discontent as seems to be suggested especially by Markakis and Ayele. Finally, if by capital it is meant "private foreign capital", as seems to be implied by these authors then it is not logical to speak of the impact of incorporation before it has taken place, before, in other words, a sizable amount of foreign capital has been imported into the country. As argued in chapter 4, the amount of private foreign capital invested in Ethiopia was absolutely minimal.<sup>4</sup> Halliday and Molyneux confirm this fact when they point out that Ethiopia and Afghanistan were not attractive economically to be absorbed into the world economy<sup>5</sup> perhaps meaning that those countries did not have the natural resources that would attract foreign capital.

Clapham rejects the validity of economic determinist explanations altogether and shifts the whole debate to the political sphere. To him, it is the political ineffectiveness of an inherently decaying monarchy and not economic exploitation that leads to revolutions. Essentially, Clapham focuses his analysis on the state perceived as being autonomous from economic or class reductionism<sup>6</sup>. Since states are at the centre of all revolutions and since it is obvious that a decaying state which is unable to control its citizens must collapse, Clapham's emphasis on the autonomy of the state is very much to the point. However, the collapse of an old-state need not necessarily lead to social and political transformations, as the collapse of the decaying Gondar dynasty did not at the time of Tewodros and his successors. Further, one of the main reasons for the failure of General Mengistu's coup of 1960 and the success of the 1974 uprising was, arguably, the fact that an enlarged and more politicised urban social sector had emerged between the two conjunctures. It appears that the varied structures should be used not only to explain the constraints and opportunities of the ancien regime but also to explain those of the modern social sector

which appears to be equally important for the emergence of the revolutionary crisis of 1974.

Perhaps, more than the works of Halliday and Molyneux as well as that of Clapham, the method employed here to explain the emergence of revolutionary crisis is a reaction to Skocpol who is one of the most influential contemporary authorities on the sociology of revolutions. To her, the emergence of a revolution is the causal convergence of three structural dimensions (the division of society into producing property-owning-surplus-appropriating classes, the internal repressive and resource extractive capabilities of the state, and the external military and economic pressures upon the state). Skocpol explains that she developed her theory from the classical Marxian perspective of the division of society into producer and surplus appropriating classes and from conflict theory<sup>7</sup>. Her work appears to be eminently relevant for the project of explaining the Ethiopian revolution not least because her work is concerned with revolutions in agrarian bureaucratic societies (France, Russia and China) which were the main focus of her study. Further<sup>s</sup> she maintains that the studying of the specific inter-relations of class and state structures and the complex interplay of domestic and international developments are useful for describing the logic of social revolutionary causes and outcomes "from France in the 1790's to Ethiopia in the 1970's"<sup>8</sup>. However, it is here in order to point out some of the difficulties involved in applying Skocpol's model to the Ethiopian experience. X

The first of these is Skocpol's insistence on what she calls "the non-purposive structural perspective" of the causes and outcomes of revolutions. In this, the central point of her argument is that the causes and outcomes of revolutions are determined by social, state and international structures and not by the will and actions of the agents of revolutions<sup>9</sup>. Without doubt, Skocpol advances forceful arguments in support of her

position; nevertheless, she can still be accused of reducing the sociology of revolution to the study of fate.

Despite its structural reductionist insistence (its refusal to take human will into account) the approach does make sense in the context of the causes of revolutions when the "emergence" of revolutionary crises appears to be beyond any individual's or group's control. The Ethiopian experience is a case in point. By all account, the uprising was spontaneous and it could hardly be otherwise in the absence of any political organization to direct the course of events, if historical events can be directed at all. Even then, an argument can be made (as in the previous paragraph) that the cognitive state of the social actors had a role to play in influencing the collapse of the ancien regime. Moreover, when it comes to the course and outcome of the revolution (to the coincidence at times between the intentions of the agents of the revolution and outcomes, to the struggles between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries, to the influence dictators yield), the impact of human will and action looks even greater.

Secondly, though Skocpol acknowledges the international capitalist system as a valid causal explanatory component, she gives much more emphasis to political rather than economic considerations. In what she calls the "organizational realist perspective", she treats the state as an autonomous organisation in competition with other states and in potential conflict with agrarian class structures<sup>10</sup>. According to this scheme, a typical scenario of the emergence of a revolutionary crisis would be if the state, because of international military threats, launched a programme of centralization or economic restructuring which goes against the interests of the dominant class. A revolutionary situation would emerge if the dominant class is in a position to obstruct the programmes,

paralyse the regime and open the way for the lower class revolt.

Arguably, such a situation existed in the Ethiopia of the 1930's when Italian invasion was a reality and when the aristocracy were obstructing the centralization and modernization drive of the monarchy (centralization and modernization set in motion by European expansionism in the first place). Nevertheless, such structural conjunctures did not lead to a revolution at the time. By 1974, however, the peasantry had shown no tendency to revolt and the aristocracy *was* replaced by the new elite as a result of the modernization policy of the monarchy so that it was unable to play its obstructive role.

To sum up, the international environment was relevant in several respects. European expansionism was important in setting in motion the processes of territorial consolidation, centralization and modernization starting from the end of the 19th century. The threat posed by the countries of the Middle East in the post-war years was important in driving Ethiopia to the security umbrella of the US and, hence, in bringing her to the centre stage of the cold war; <sup>in</sup> the broad sense aid and trade were important in ex~~acerbating~~acerbating the food crisis of the early 1970's and, also, in creating constraints to the economic development of Ethiopia; and the contact of the new elite with western Europe was important in providing to the former contemporary political modes.

The emergence of the revolutionary crisis was in part the result, not of capitalist penetration which in the case of Ethiopia was incidental, but of the longtime centralization and modernization policy of the monarchy which gave rise to a class of military and civilian bureaucrats, teachers, students, and workers who together embodied the core of the 1974 protest uprising. Further, Skocpol's idea of state competition leading to changes in domestic economic policies which result in agrarian elite obstruction and in peasant revolt does not appear to be

relevant to the emergence of the revolutionary crisis in Ethiopia. The fact that the crisis did not involve the agrarian class structures distinguishes the Ethiopian experience from the French and Soviet revolutions but not necessarily from those of China and Vietnam where the rural sector was mobilized after the collapse of the old-states.

### (C) THE MOBILIZATION OF THE RURAL POPULATION

The question in the abstract of "Which class is revolutionary?" does not seem to be particularly helpful. The workers, who are normally portrayed by Marxists as the most revolutionary of classes, have been accused in the circumstances of the two world wars of having played a reactionary role in abandoning the principles of proletarian internationalism and in fighting on the side of nationalist and conservative forces. Conversely, the middle class which is normally portrayed as reactionary had, according to Marx, played a revolutionary role at the time of the French revolution. Further, Lenin, and later Soviet scholars, have accorded a revolutionary role to anti-imperialist, anti-communist and who were nationalist third world leaders.<sup>11</sup> There seems to be a general consensus that the feudal class is reactionary though it could, perhaps, arguably be maintained that the class did not necessarily play a reactionary role in the German and Japanese transformations in which it acted in concert with the reforming upper class. From this, it can be concluded that whether a particular class is revolutionary or not depends not on the intrinsic disposition of the class so much as on the context within which it is operating.

In the wake of the successful peasant revolutions of the 20th century, and particularly in the wake of the Vietnamese peasant revolution which pinned down the resources of a superpower over such a long time, the contexts within which peasants participate in radical

politics have been made the subject of scrutiny by western scholars. Thus scrutinized were the immediate circumstances of the peasants including their geo-politics, their mode of production and their relations with landlords; the relations of the peasants to political organizations; their relations with the state; and the impact of the international capitalist world on them<sup>12</sup>. It is believed that of these composite factors, political organizations, state competition, relations with the old-state, geo-politics and mode of production are, in various degrees, the most relevant to the mobilization of the Ethiopian rural population. As described in chapter 4, the Ethiopian rural relations of production were so diverse that one could find parallels between them and those categories that are familiar in the Marxian tradition: primitive, communal, classical, feudal, Asiatic and capitalist. Nevertheless, suffice it here to comment only on three rural social formations (the nomads, the tenants and the rist-holders) as these together constituted almost the entire rural population.

The general literature on nomad participation in radical politics is thin on the ground; however, the Ethiopian experience confronts us precisely with this question. It has been pointed out in chapter 1 that the Islamic nomads of the Ogaden and of the Eritrean Sahil plains had been involved in regional or secessionist struggles against the central Christian government since about 1960. It was argued, further, that this was occasioned by the emergence among them of political organizations (WSLF and ELF) and by the ability of these organizations to persuade the nomads that it was in their interest to provide the organizations with human and material resources and participate in the struggle. It was also pointed out that the involvement of the nomads in radical politics was made possible by the material and diplomatic support provided by the Islamic states of the Middle East in the hope of promoting the cause of their co-religionists in those regions of Ethiopia.<sup>13</sup> In

chapters 5 and 7, it has also been pointed out that the Islamic nomads of Afar were similarly mobilized in 1976 by the ALF with the backing of the conservative Arab states.<sup>14</sup> In these cases, it is not difficult to see how the interplay between the emergence of even conservative political organizations, state competition and geo-politics (the fact that the nomads lived in areas that could easily be penetrated by the political organizations and the Islamic states) goes to mobilize nomadic people into radical politics.

On the other hand, the new regime has failed to mobilize the nomadic people into the revolutionary process and, hence, into the political life of the country. This was because some of those communities have continued to be controlled by the regionalist political organizations. Further, in the case of the remaining, the institutions created by the revolution (cadres and mass organizations) have not been versatile enough to penetrate the ever mobile nomads and influence their lives. The regionalist organizations have, in this regard, shown superior commitment and versatility.

The sedentary farmers who constitute the great majority of the people who live in the highlands of Ethiopia. Save in the numerically unimportant cases of those in the highlands of Bale and Eritrea, the rest were neither mobilized by any political organization nor hardly incorporated into the political life of the old-state. The Derg, in competition with the leftist political organizations (most notable EPRP and AESM) for the heart and mind of the peasants issued the policy of Development Through Campaign Programme in November 1974 and the Public Ownership of Rural Land Proclamation in March 1975. With the help of these legislations the landed class was ousted from their land holding and the peasantry was organized before the year was out.

The deployment in the countryside of some 60,000 teachers and students from January 1975 under the Campaign Programme created the occasion for EPRP and AESM

to strengthen themselves by recruiting members from among the participants of the Programme and to take an active part in the politicisation and organization of the peasant masses. The teachers and students, who had already been highly politicized, were if anything overzealous in their campaign to instigate the peasants to revolt and drive the landlords out of their holdings. The speed with which these groups acted was so swift that the Derg's radicalism could not keep abreast with the events. Despite that, it can only be said that the Derg did, indeed, take the initiative in the mobilization of the peasants; not only did it issue the Campaign Programme which created the conditions under which the teachers, students and political organizations were able to act, but also issued the Proclamation which authorised the "nationalization" of rural land and its redistribution to the peasants. Further, even more important was the fact that it committed the state's military resources against landlord backlash.

Regarding the degree of incorporation of the rural population into the new polity, a distinction is often made between the peasants of the north and those of the south on the basis of the particular relations of production that had prevailed among them. Prior to the reforms in the south, where big land ownership and crop-sharing arrangements were widespread, the peasants are said to have embraced the transformation with open arms; whereas in the north, where the rist system was widespread, the peasants are said to be resistant to the change and to the new regime. Viewed from the perspective of the prevalence of guerilla activities against the regime in the north, the argument seems to hold water. However, there are considerations which militate against pinning down the resistance entirely to the differences in the modes of production that had existed in the north and south.

First, though there was a greater incidence of share-cropping arrangements in the south, there were at

the same time important pockets of tenancy among minority groups in the north. The figures of the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration suggest that the extent of tenancy in the south and north was about 25 percent and 11 percent of the rural population, respectively. Second, though the extent and variation is not clear, upper class surplus appropriation and exaction of certain "seigneurial" rights had persisted both among share-croppers and rist-holders. Third, more important, was the fact that the Derg's reforms were carried out in the north in competition with a number of other political organizations which were opposed to it, namely, EPLF, EPRP, EDU and TPLF. The preponderance of resistance in the north can in part be explained by geo-political factors: by the region's proximity to northern Sudan and the Red Sea and through them to the Middle East from where much of the assistance to the insurgents has originated. It has already been noted that the conservative Arab states were providing assistance to ELF, EDU and ALF and trying to bring them under a joint front and that the EPLF, which was, probably, receiving much of its assistance from the progressive forces in the Middle East and beyond, was promoting EPRP and TLF.

In some respects, the factors relevant for the mobilization of the nomads and peasants were similar. In both cases, geo-politics and political organizations appear to have played an important role. On the other hand, however, the nomads (but not the peasants) seem to have been capable of acting in the face of danger to their security posed by the old state. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that they live a mobile life which had precluded the emergence among them of an upper class allied to the state and capable of regulating their daily lives. This could only have made it difficult for the State to establish a presence of its administrative machinery in their midst and control them. These factors coupled with the emergence of political organizations among them, shielded the nomadic people from reprisals by

the old state. The importance of the international factor appears to have been as important to nomad mobilization in the lowlands as the collapse of the old-state was to the peasant mobilization in the highlands.

The elite, especially when organized and armed, appears to play the most crucial role in the mobilization of the lower class; this seems to have been born out by the experience of Ethiopia. This is not surprising since it is the class capable of articulating the grievances of the lower class, providing alternative political models, acting as a vehicle for the transfer of resources from international sources and since, above all, it stands to benefit from the redistribution of power involved in the revision of the status quo. The Ethiopian experience suggests that the convergence of nationalism and Leninist strategy in a political organization appears to make it much more potent and effective than organizations which lack one or both elements. TPLF which espoused Maoism and which operated among the linguistic group of Tigre from which its members were drawn is the only credible organization to the south of Eritrea which has survived the 1977 new regime's onslaught against the pan-Ethiopian and regionalist political organizations. Conversely, EDU which was right wing and EPRP which was left wing, (both being pan-Ethiopian organizations), were not based on a particular nationality and they were both wiped out by the Derg during 1977. The triumph in Eritrea of the left wing EPLF over its right wing rival (ELF) appears to confirm this argument. The doubling by TPLF and EPLF in Maoist style guerilla strategy and the exploitation of local nationalist sentiments appears to have given these organizations superior qualities in mobilizing the rural population.

Skocpol makes a distinction between autonomous patterns of peasant mobilization (the French, Russian and Mexican revolutions) and directed patterns of peasant mobilization (the Chinese, Vietnamese and Cuban

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revolutions and the anti-colonial movements in Portuguese Africa). Under the first pattern, the peasants revolt during the breakdown of the ancien regime thus undercutting the landed upper class and preparing the way for the emergence of the revolutionary state. In these cases, the organizations of the new state do not mobilize the peasants politically but rather by coercively imposing administrative and military controls on the countryside. Under the second pattern, on the other hand, the peasants are directly mobilized by organizing revolutionary movements either before (Cuba and Portuguese Africa) or after (China and Vietnam) the collapse of the ancien regime. According to Skocpol, though peasant participation under the second pattern is less spontaneous than under the first, the results could still be more favourable to the peasants because, during the revolutionary process, direct links would have been established between them and the political organizations and because peasant resources and manpower would have ended up participating in the building up of the new regime's social institutions and state organizations as a result of the direct mobilizations<sup>15</sup>.

Viewed from these perspectives, the mobilization of the Ethiopian peasantry appears to have been an episode unto itself. Unlike the first pattern of mobilization, the role of the Ethiopian peasants at the time of the popular uprising of 1974 was minimal. It was neither spontaneous nor autonomous nor did it lead to sudden land seizures nor to refusal of any feudal rights and thus preparing the ground for a revolutionary regime to take over.

Further, the mobilization of the Ethiopian peasants does not fit the second pattern either. Initially, EPRP had a peasant-based guerilla strategy with which it sought to encircle the urban centres and squeeze out the ancien regime. However, despite the fact that it continued to establish and strengthen isolated rural military bases after the outbreak of the revolution, EPRP

was deflected from that strategy by its choice in the summer of 1976 to launch an urban armed struggle against Mengistu's coalition; the result was total defeat in the urban centres and internecine squabbles which led to the dismantling of its bases in the countryside. With the exception of TPLF which may have designs of replacing the central government by over-running the cities from a rural base, this put an end to the possibility of a direct peasant mobilization by an organization contending for power against the ancien regime and against the new one.

Instead, the peasants were mobilized mainly by the Derg after the ancien regime had collapsed and, hence, without their human and material resources having participated in the revolutionary process in exchange for land redistribution and for abolition of upper class exploitation. The one exception to this was the fact that the hundreds of thousands of the militia was raised from among the peasants, In the spring of 1977, in this way, the peasants did, indeed, take part, not so much in the red terror, but in the new regime's anti-regionalist and anti-counter-revolutionary wars. However, this came (not as a result of reciprocal benefits) but as a result of forceful recruitment made possible by the new regime's coercive imposition already achieved before the wars of 1977.

The imposition on the peasants of the regime's social and administrative institutions began with the establishment of peasant associations as envisaged by the Public Ownership of Rural Land Proclamation of March 1975, which was substantially implemented in the same year. Thereafter, the associations were established at the wereda, awraja, provincial and national levels. In this way, the peasants were subordinated to the Derg and then to the party. The peasants were also subordinated to the local government administration through which superior government decisions were communicated and implemented. According to the 1975 Proclamation the main

function of the associations was to take part in the redistribution of land. Later, however, their functions were extended to cover a wide mandate over local social, economic, political and security affairs. In the meantime, the intensification of the struggle between EPRP and Mengistu's coalition and, later, between the member organizations of the coalition inter se gave a boost to their use by the regime as instruments of campaign and coercion in its drive to oust members and supporters of those political organizations from the ranks of the associations. More importantly, however, they recruited from among their members hundreds of thousands men to help in the raising of a peoples militia which fought in the wars against Somalia in 1977 and of the regions since then. One of the effects of the emphasis laid on the organization, politicization and arming of the peasants and in that way, sucking them into conflicts of the political organizations has been the neglect of their social and economic functions.

Perhaps, the fact that peasant participation in the revolutionary process was not based on reciprocal benefits with the government but rather exacted coercively goes some way to explain the regime's attitudes towards them. When prompted by aid agencies, its officials often argue that the quota system, (by which the peasants are forced to sell a portion of their produce to the government at below the market price), should not be abolished because the peasants have benefited a lot from the revolution whereas the urban population has not. Further, the regime has felt free to forcefully move the peasant from one end of the country to the other under its "Resettlement Programme" (a programme ostensibly designed to give fertile land to the drought affected peasants) It has also felt free to forcefully herd them into villages from their pre-existing scattered hamlets under its programme of "villagization" (a programme intended allegedly to

facilitate the delivery of services like schools, clinics and meals).

To sum up, with the exception of the nomads and the highland peasants a variable number of whom have come under the control of the regionalist movements over the years, the remaining sections of the Rural population have been mobilized and incorporated into the new polity. Since then, the peasants have controlled the movements of anti-government elements in the countryside, and provided the regime with fighting men as well as with their "surplus" produce to feed its army. What they have received in return is not clear. The redistribution of land has granted them a mere right to use land; it has not led to the control of their surplus any more than the previous system had done. The one sidedness of the benefits in the relations between the peasants and the state is, arguably, a result of the way they were mobilized. It did not come about as a result of instigating them to take part in the revolutionary processes with any degree of enthusiasm through promises of good times to come but as a result of coercively organizing, politicizing and arming them. If the Ethiopian experience is a case of peasant revolution, it can be so only to the extent that the peasants are used by the new state.

#### (D) THE CONTENDING AGENTS OF THE REVOLUTION

Various writers have proposed different social groups and classes as being effective agents of the Ethiopian revolution. The candidates are the lower class (workers and peasants), the upper class (the high civilian and military officials), and the intermediate social strata. However, the question of which class or other social group "led" the revolution is important in the characterisation of the revolution and the answer to it depends on the approach adopted.

An example of this is Marx who defines the role of classes in revolutions as follows: the generation of a nascent mode of production within the confines of an existing one creates a dynamic basis for the growth of unity and consciousness of each proto-revolutionary class through ongoing struggles with the existing dominant class... The revolution is accomplished through class action led by the self-conscious rising revolutionary class, i.e., the bourgeoisie in bourgeois revolutions and by the proletariat in socialist revolutions.<sup>16</sup> In Ethiopia, there was no middle class to talk of and the small size of the proletariat that existed did at best participate in the urban uprising of 1974 and, like the other social institutions, became the arena of struggle for the regime and the political organizations thereafter. At no stage did it play a leading role. Marx did not envisage the intermediate and peasant classes as revolutionary.

The ideas of later day Marxists are, perhaps, more relevant to the Ethiopian case than those of Marx himself; however, their controversial nature makes their usefulness doubtful. It was they, most notably soviet scholars, who developed the notion of the non-capitalist path of development or states of socialist orientation according to which it was envisaged that an amalgam of intermediate and/or lower classes in pre-capitalist states could lead any revolution at all. But then, the controversy has since been raging as to whether such a revolution is nationalist, middle class or socialist which in effect means that the question of which class is leading it is unsettled.<sup>17</sup> Arguably, a version of this approach is that of Markakis who maintains that the Ethiopian revolution was led by the workers and peasants with the support of certain sections of the intermediate classes especially the students.<sup>18</sup> However, in the case of Ethiopia, it is difficult to maintain that intermediate classes and their organizations were

organically linked to the exploited classes since any interaction between them and the workers and peasants was at best superficial having come only after the outbreak of the revolutionary crisis of 1974.

Skocpol, who draws her approach from Marx, defines social revolutions as follows: "Social revolutions are rapid basic transformations of a society's class and state structures and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class based revolts from below."<sup>19</sup> The changes that have taken place in Ethiopia certainly amount to a rapid and basic transformation of class and state structures. However, the reference to social revolutions being of necessity accompanied or in part carried through by class based revolts from below is of doubtful validity at least to the experience of Ethiopia. In fact, when Skocpol talks about revolts from below, she has in mind peasant revolt in the overthrow of her ancien regimes of France and Russia or the overthrow of a post-revolutionary state which fails to control the countryside as in the case of post-1911 China. Skocpol does not think much of urban uprisings. In the case of Ethiopia, however, urban revolt was by far the most important factor in the overthrow of the old-state. Peasant participation came as part of the revolutionary regime's programme of reform. In fact, whether the word "revolt" can ever be used to refer to any of the Ethiopian peasant activities at any stage is doubtful.

Another approach is proffered by Trimberger's notion of "revolution from above". According to it, high military and civilian bureaucrats, without great land holdings or ties to landlords or merchant classes, overthrow traditional rulers and institute a programme of modernization covering radical social and economic reforms.<sup>20</sup> Halliday and Maxine Molyneux endorse, with some proviso, this proposition as being valid to the Ethiopian case.<sup>21</sup>

Here again, the problem is the question of the actors in the revolution. Skocpol's cases show a crucial

role being played by the lower class. By contrast, the cases of Trimberger (the revolutions of Japan in 1868, Turkey in 1923, Egypt in 1952 and Peru in 1968) show the crucial role being played by the upper class (the high military and civilian bureaucrats). It may be maintained that since the radical socio-political reforms in Ethiopia were by and large given by the Derg to the peasants (instead of resulting from reciprocal transactions between the two), the revolution was carried out from above. However, viewed strictly from the class point of view, it is doubtful whether the notion of "revolution from above" fits the Ethiopian experience at all.

Such a possibility existed in the abortive coup of 1960. One of the differences between it and the 1974 onslaught against the old-state was the fact that the former, perhaps like most military political revolts, was led by high military and civilian officials while the latter was led by lower ranking officers, NCO's and privates. This seems to suggest that the 1974 political crisis was, if anything, a result of lower class action or a revolt from below as argued by some observers on the basis that the lower ranking officers and privates were from humbler backgrounds than the senior ones. The fact that in 1974 the employees of all the government and non-government organizations were at odds with the top several officials in each of those organizations has, generally, also been invoked to support the argument that the revolt of that year was from below. Whatever the merits of these arguments, it is difficult to maintain that the Ethiopian socio-political transformation was a case of revolution from above since, in 1974 and after, it was the intermediate classes that were the most important actors in the revolution and since the high military and civilian officials were eliminated by them.

Upper and lower class action in the early stages of the Ethiopian revolution was made to look important. However, this was not because the lower class revolted

and prepared the ground for the takeover of power by the revolutionary regime nor because the upper class, which was in any case weakened by long years of the monarchy's modernization programme put up much resistance against the revolution. Rather, it was, arguably, because, being influenced by Leninist strategies the agents of the revolution saw the lower class as a potential ally of the revolution to be cultivated and the upper class as an enemy of the revolution to be eliminated and, consequently, echoed these notions in their campaigns and actions.

In other words, it was the intermediate classes (the security forces, the civilian bureaucrats, the students, teachers and workers) who, without much support from below or much resistance from above "revolted" in 1974 and prepared the ground for the takeover of power by the armed forces. Moreover, afterwards, the course of the revolution is characterized not so much by lower and upper class conflict but by the struggle between the political organizations inter se and between them and the regime. It appears, also, that the intensity of the struggle as reflected in the red terror and the depth of the transformations as reflected in the radicalism of the nationalization of rural land was the result not of class but of rivalry between the same actors over power. Thus, Skocpol's and Trimberger's notion of lower and upper class participation in revolutions does not appear to be half as important to the Ethiopian case as that of the intermediate class.

With some proviso, I find Tilly's idea of revolution more aptly describes the effective actors and the interplay between them that gave birth to the transformations in the Ethiopian revolution than do the works of Marx, Skocpol or Trimberger. According to Tilly's model, a revolution is a special kind of collective action in which the government and other organized contenders for power fight for ultimate sovereignty over a population and in which the contenders

succeed in displacing existing power holders.<sup>22</sup> Tilly's idea of "multiple sovereignty which relates to the occasion of the take over of power from an old-state can be extended to describe the course of the revolution afterwards. Examples of this in the case of Ethiopia were the post-1974 struggle among the political organizations which culminated in the red terror of 1977, and the ensuing intense competition over the recruitment of members by the remaining organizations during which the population was forced to obey more than one authority. More relevant to the issue at hand is, however, the fact that Tilly accords a central role not to upper or lower class but to organized group action in the course and outcome of the revolution. It was the organized corporate groups that were most active during the popular uprising of 1974 and, afterwards, it was the political organizations that took their place and brought about "socialist" socio-economic and political reforms by creating pressure on the Derg. Needless to say, these organized groups were dominated by the intermediate sections of the population.

This may explain how the interplay of actions by the organized groups up to at least 1977 influenced the outcomes of the revolution but it does not explain the question of why the intermediate classes, especially the lower ranking officers and privates, became active in the 1974 popular uprising in the first place. Here, perhaps, culture rather than class is the more helpful of the two explanations. According to some anthropologists, the class stratification of the Ethiopian society has not been as strictly articulated and solidified as it is in Europe. According to Levine, for example, the Ethiopian peasant thinks that he is borne to great destiny and that his current position is to him only provisional.<sup>23</sup> Further, it is widely known that the son of a well-to-do person left his home early in his childhood for a distant place and pursued priesthood, a military-administrative career or any other profession by attending a church

school or by serving a master often in extremely deprived circumstances. Also, whatever title he earns in his life time like fiefdom was often not capable of being passed on to his heirs. Yet again, though one of the dynasties maintained that it was a descendant of Solomon the Wise and, hence, claimed an exclusive hold on the throne, there were other dynasties that ruled northern Ethiopia over the centuries. For example, two outstanding 16th century monarchs (Tewodros and Yohannis), who initiated the territorial consolidation and centralization of present-day Ethiopia, had no royal connections whatever and, arguably, suffered no legitimacy crisis as a result. In other words, class and position were, to say the least, less transgenerational, and vertical social mobility more widespread, than in Europe. To Moore at least, culture plays a dominant role in whether a social group took part in revolutionary politics or not.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps, this suggests that in Ethiopia an individual or group capable of altering its social position would readily take advantage of a favourable situation created by the convergence of structural changes even when that involves the use of force and violence. Compared to other social groups, the army had the advantage of being organized and armed, perhaps the reason why the other classes and social groups were not able to act effectively and alter their position. Moreover, with the establishment of Revolutionary Front and the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, the army acquired a political organization and ideology which gave it a sense of purpose, international allies and further access to the resources of coercion on top of what it had inherited from the old-state. Though the civilian political organizations greatly influenced the outcome of the revolution, they were no match to such a military and political organization and were doomed to lose the struggle against it.

That the army should succeed in taking power is hardly surprising when we consider the multiplicity of

military coups and political revolutions in the third world by which the Derg could not but be influenced. In fact, the first attempted military coup in sub-saharan Africa was the one attempted against Haile Selassie in 1960 in which most of the Derg members would have participated by fighting on the side of the loyalists. As such, they were fully aware of the fate that befell the 1960 coup leaders and their followers (capital punishment, imprisonment and banishments to remote garrisons) and were well aware of what would befall them, should the old-state make a come back, after they got involved in the 1974 mutinies and arbitrary arrests of government officials. This was a good reason for soldiering on with the business of overthrowing the government once they were implicated in the popular uprising. Probably, the turning point in this regard came with the massacre of the 60 officials of the old-state in November 1974. After that, they could not live safely as private citizens since there was danger of reprisals from friends and relations of the victims.

#### (E) TOWARDS AN EVALUATION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY CRISIS

There seems to be a consensus on the understanding that a degree of socio-economic and political transformations have to be achieved before a social revolution can be said to have taken place. However, there is lack of clarity on what exactly the effect of the sum of such transformations is or ought to be. In fact, Clapham appears to suggest that it is not necessary to adopt some criteria against which the transformations could be weighed; to him, it is enough for transformations to have been achieved for a revolution to exist even when the transformations have brought about little change from the past.<sup>25</sup> To Markakis, a revolution can be said to have been achieved if the sum of transformations amounts to true socialism.<sup>26</sup> To Halliday and Molyneux, the transformations must bring about an

effective distribution of social and political power for an irreversible socialist revolution to be achieved.<sup>27</sup>

None of these authors in fact go into the question of evaluating the transformations in any detail.

Likewise, Skocpol seems to be satisfied with a mere achievement of transformations. She delimits the scope of transformations thus: "Social revolutions differ from other sorts of conflicts and transformative processes above all by the combination of two coincidences: the coincidence of societal structural change with class upheaval; and the coincidence of political with social transformation."<sup>28</sup> In this way, she distinguishes the conflicts of social revolutions from other conflicts like rebellions, coups, and political revolutions. Further, she distinguishes transformations of social revolutions from other sorts of transformations like the industrial-commercial revolutions and the rise of nation-states. To Skocpol, the transformations achieved in Japan, Germany and Turkey do not amount to social revolutions; to Trimberger, on the other hand, they do.<sup>29</sup> Both appear to agree that, whatever their implications to economic progress, radical socio-economic reforms in themselves constitute revolutions, in the case of Skocpol, if the transformations are accompanied by revolts from below, and, in the case of Trimberger, if the transformations are carried out from above.

To Marx, on the other hand, transformation of the mode of production is central, in the order of revolutionary outcomes.<sup>30</sup> As opposed to Skocpol and Trimberger, therefore, Marx would regard the unleashing of more dynamic relations of production than the pre-existing ones as a more important requisite to social revolutions than mere social and political transformations.

The question that arises here is whether revolutions are progressive in the economic sense or not. Here, note must be taken of Clapham's important caution against adopting some assumed goal and concluding that the goal

will inevitably be attained once the revolution is taken to be a proper one or, conversely concluding that the revolution is not a real one because the goal is not met.<sup>31</sup> In considering whether revolutions are progressive or not there is, perhaps, the danger of falling foul of Clapham's warning against what he has called the teleological conception of revolution. However, this cannot be allowed to stand in the way of inquiring of whether the older revolutions like those of France, the Soviet Union and China or the post-war third world revolutions, of which there were a number, were progressive or not and, given their performance over time, of making reasonable projections into their prospects. This may lead to a kind of evaluation of revolution but then evaluation is no less scientific than explanation assuming that the two are different. If such a scientific inquiry leads to the finding that some revolutions have been progressive but not others, it would certainly be fruitful to establish, if possible, wherein lies the difference between the two types of episodes.

At any rate, there are further considerations why the question of whether revolutions are progressive or not should be accorded a central position in the order of transformations. First, though writers in the field do not always explicitly acknowledge it, they often revert to a recognition of its centrality quite frequently. Apart from discussing economic aspects of post-revolutionary reconstructions in her cases, Skocpol for one, states in her introductory chapter that the Russian revolution produced an industrial and military super-power and the Mexican revolution made it one of the most industrialized of post-colonial nations<sup>32</sup>. Second, much of the appeal of engaging in revolutionary activities not only to professional revolutionaries but also to large sections of the people who get involved rests on economic nationalism and the pursuit of faster rates of industrialization. The frequency of revolutions

in the third world can in part be explained by this consideration. Third, dwelling on social and political transformations alone would, it is believed, render the sociology or revolutions sterile. On the face of it, the pursuit of equality (an example of social structural transformation) is worth all the effort. However, apart from the fact that it is unattainable, economic measures like redistribution of land taken with a view to equality as an end in itself can lead to the levelling down of society, fragmentation of the means of production and lower productivity.

Finally, there are many excesses of revolutions like suspension of legality, diaspora, mass executions, torture and terror which are often prevalent in the immediate post-revolution years and which obviously cause the people concerned undue suffering. Legality, democratic rights, accountability to the people of the new institutions created by the revolution and the like could be used as criteria against which the quality of the transformations could be weighed. In fact, these criteria have been used in the relevant chapters to evaluate the component parts of the transformations. Nevertheless, since the rule of law and the standards of human rights break down during revolutionary crisis, it is, perhaps, not in order to give emphasis to such standards here. If, in addition to the suffering of the people, the social and political transformations are not progressive in the economic sense and promise some benefits to the majority of the people in the not distant future or, even worse, if they are retrogressive, then social revolutions must be taken for what they would be: a mass suicidal delirium that seize nations at certain stages in their history or a structural crisis about which men and women are unable to do anything but fall prey to their excesses.

The literature on the Ethiopian revolution suffers from similar shortcomings as the above. Much of it ignores the economic transformations achieved altogether

and the rest discusses in a cursory fashion the areas in which nationalizations have taken place without evaluating whether the measures are likely to lead to a growth in the national economy. Though inadequate in itself, it is hoped, that Chapter 4 is a modest corrective in this regard. It has been noted in that Chapter that in 1975 the new regime nationalized rural land and the major means of production in the industrial sector expropriating national and foreign investors. Starting from 1978, the regime made a concerted effort to launch a central planning machinery in order to manage the nationalized industries, state farms and rural land especially that part which had been collectivised. These radical state interventions in the economy and the adoption of scientific socialism as the official ideology were partially responsible for the strengthening of close diplomatic and security relations with the socialist countries, and for the worsening of relations with the west. Arguably, these policies together amounted to the adoption by Ethiopia of what is called "the non-capitalist path of development" often understood to include an emphasis of the state sector of the economy, thorough going agrarian reform, limitation on foreign investment and a pro-east foreign policy.

The adherence to the non-capitalist path of development, it is believed, raises a number of fundamental economic questions with negative implications in the international and domestic arenas about which only a brief mention can be made here. Under the old-state, Ethiopia had not been able to attract much international private capital, perhaps, mainly because of the absence in the country of the sort of natural resources required by foreign interests. Despite the new regime's policy of attempting to attract private foreign capital through the establishment of joint ventures in which the state was envisaged to have a minimum of 51 percent of total shares, foreign investors have not found it in their interest to risk their capital by investing it in

Ethiopia, not least because of the expropriation of foreign assets that had preceded the issuance of the Joint Venture Proclamation. Thus, in addition to the absence of the relevant natural resources, the new policy has acted as a barrier to private foreign investment.

The picture regarding bilateral and multilateral aid is more complex. Though Ethiopia had through its leftist policies fallen foul of western expectations and though the US for one is by law bound to prohibit bilateral assistance to such countries and to exercise against them its weighted voting power in the international economic organizations, Ethiopia has not done too badly in exploiting the international public assistance programmes. Despite the fact that direct US bilateral assistance has been suspended for a long time, Ethiopia has been a beneficiary of a great deal of food aid (which is traceable to the US government and EEC sources), and of economic development aid from the EEC, the World Bank and other UN agencies, and from a lot of the western countries which have been willing to extend direct state to state assistance. Further, the US weighted voting power in the International Coffee Agreement has not precluded Ethiopia from selling her major export (coffee) through that organization to western countries including the US.

Obviously, the west has not victimized Ethiopia as much as it had Vietnam, Cuba and Nicaragua; rather, it has chosen to use its economic muscle on Ethiopia, as it has done with most other socialist countries, as sticks and carrots in its foreign policy drive to influence her political direction. Though counter-factual, it may be maintained that had Ethiopia not offended the west, it might have avoided all the sticks in addition to attracting greater transfers of international capital and other forms of public aid. In fact, Ethiopia's per capita benefit from aid has been reduced in the post-revolution period to become one of the lowest in Africa. Also, an important point is that the radical third world

states including Ethiopia have not found it appropriate to pursue autarchy as a possible alternative but rather sought to secure aid not only from the socialist countries as is expected but also from the west. Some which have attempted that alternative like Tanzania and China have not found it fruitful and have abandoned it. Autarchy is a luxury which they cannot afford since they need the aid for the purpose of importing skills, capital goods and weapons from abroad without which they can hardly survive let alone achieve faster rates of development.

The adoption of the non-capitalist path of development creates further complications by bringing the country concerned to the centre stage of the cold war. The force of example is here too overwhelming to maintain otherwise. The right wing/left wing contenders for power in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Mozambique, Angola, just to mention a few, are provided weapons by the west and east to fight it out to the bitter end. In the case of Ethiopia, the aggression perpetrated against her by Somalia and the counter-revolutionary wars she had to fight against the EDU, ELF and ALF, which were supported by the Middle East and through them by the west, can be seen as an extension of the cold war into the Horn of Africa.

There are occasional reports suggesting western involvement in the regionalist and anti-government wars of Ethiopia.<sup>33</sup> Further the circumstances lend support to this position. These peripheral wars have increased dramatically not only in the areas where they existed prior to the outbreak of the revolution, but also in the areas where they emerged afterwards. The bulk of the weapons used by these forces come from abroad; they certainly come from the Middle East but western aiding and abetting of those benefactors cannot be ruled out; if the west challenges the other radical states through the promotion of dissension, there is no reason to suggest that Ethiopia was made an exception. The choice of the

non-capitalist path of development has reduced the new regime to a defensive position in these crippling wars as it has done to the radical third world states which have pursued a similar revolutionary course. Anti-colonial third world revolutions have produced politically independent states; anti-imperialist (anti-world-capitalist) third world revolutions, on the other hand, cannot be said to have produced economically independent states.

The debilitating effect on the national economy of these wars is obvious. However, it is not possible to attribute all the ills of the economy to the hostility of international and domestic "enemies" of the revolution as Mengistu has, time and again, tended to emphasise in his public speeches. The implications of the regime's policy on the domestic economy must also account for a good deal of the inefficiency in the running of the economy. Whereas in the west a company is run by a manager with the assistance of some experts in accounting, engineering, salesmen and the like, the equivalent in the socialist countries (a state enterprise or a state farm) is run by the same kind of people in addition to a multitude of civil servants working at each level of the state administrative machinery from the central government down to the enterprise. The amount of red tape, the delay in the procurement of raw materials, the inefficiency in the distribution of products, the concealed unemployment, the sectional and regional autarchy involved in managing the state enterprises is well recorded in the case of the older socialist countries. A further crippling feature of the socialist management of the economy is the fact that the means of production are owned by the state and that the interest not only of workers but also the bureaucrats involved in the management is limited to their pay. The protection of the means of production and the maximization of profit (which have important implications to efficiency) have no real guardians like the owner in the capitalist

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countries. Yet again, the attempt to substitute incentives based on private ownership and personal gain by an ever-increasing elaborate system of collective incentives (the raising of social consciousness, working for the communist and nationalist ideals and group bonuses) have not proved as effective as the former. It is these and similar management difficulties that Ethiopia has been importing since the adoption of central planning as an aspect of her non-capitalist path of development strategy. In her case, the problems are further compounded by the fact that the skilled administrative substructure required at each level of the administrative hierarchy is lacking in quality as well as quantity.

From the perspective of employment difficulties as well as the depth of food crisis that has been the cause of so much suffering and death in Ethiopia, it can be said that the need to adopt an efficient agrarian strategy would have been even more urgent than the pursuit of an efficient industrial policy. Up to the early 1980's the regime's policy was to collectivize the redistributed holdings and bring them within the central planning machinery, a policy which would have raised similar problems as those that concern state enterprises and farms. As the decade wore on, however, collectivization slackened for a number of reasons. These included lack of interest on the part of the peasants, their expectation that the state would provide all the inputs without them having to do much about it, the inability of the government to provide the inputs that it kept on promising in order to promote collectivization, and the inefficiency of the token collectives already established.

The result has been that only a tiny part of the arable land (under 2 percent) has been collectivized. Since then, the regime has been forced to try and promote productivity through the targeting of extension services to the millions of individual peasants without much

success in promoting their productivity. The difficulties involved are too detailed to go into at this stage, suffice it here to mention just a few. First, there is lack of incentive on the part of the farmers to increase productivity because the regime appropriates a large part their produce through forced purchases at below the market price, levies, taxes, and collects mandatory contributions towards social institutions and various causes. Second, the farmers are allowed to use their holdings until such time as their associations decide to redistribute land, a practice that has had negative implications to the care of the land and to the independence of the farmers from association leaders. Third, providing inputs like fertilizers and agricultural implements through farmers' service co-operatives and farmers' associations which are charged with the responsibilities of collecting payments for them has led to the wasting of substantial amounts of financial and other resources partly because the leaders do not have the requisite skills for keeping appropriate balance sheets and partly because of corrupt practices.

When looked at the national level, these problems are colossal. The bulk of them emanate from the socialist orientation of the revolution, from lack of faith in the merits of the individuals' pursuit of enlightened self interest and, consequently, the preference of social groups and organizations to the individual as the basic economic units, and from the conviction that state intervention in the economy would achieve a faster rate of development and a more just society. The non-capitalist path of development in Ethiopia has put an end to the development of the emerging commercial farms which certainly were extremely efficient in terms of raising productivity. If socialist orientation is more inimical than feudalism to the emergence of capitalism, as appears to be the case, it is at least debatable which of the two relations of production are more progressive.

The concept of the non-capitalist path of development is a highly controversial subject among Marxist intellectuals. Much of the controversy revolves around the question of whether it will lead the third world countries that have adopted it towards a socialist transformation or not. A lot of the debate among the Ethiopian leftist political organizations and among leftist writers on Ethiopia has similarly dwelt on the question of whether the Derg's rule would lead to a socialist transformation or end up being a mere military dictatorship. As suggested in the preceding paragraphs, however, the fact of socialist orientation (real or unreal) is part of the problem. The concern that the Derg is lacking in socialism assumes that socialist relations of production are necessarily more progressive than their capitalist counterparts, an assumption not validated by reality.

In fact, the bulk of the older socialist countries have abandoned central planning in favour of the market economy or are in the process of so doing. For the third world states, the capitalist path of development is not necessarily a solution. While it may be argued that it is the more efficient method of mobilizing the national economy, it does very little to alter the existing dependency relationship between the rich and poor states. The non-capitalist path of development does poorly on both counts. The point is that, given the context of world-time, third world "socialist " revolutions like that of Ethiopia are no more progressive than middle class revolutions in achieving economic growth and independence. If anything, the evidence suggests that they are less so. At any rate, if the non-capitalist path of development leads to socialism and then to capitalism , as it seems to be doing in the case of the older socialist states, as opposed to providing a mechanism for by-passing capitalism as it was originally intended to do - it is a much more circuitous route to capitalism than a mere middle class revolution.

The import of the preceding paragraphs is that Ethiopia has achieved transformations in the social, political, and economic fields, that the transformations, nevertheless, do not amount to a progressive change in the economic sense of the term and that whether this turn of events amounts to a social revolution or not depends on the approach adopted. If the arguments attempting to show that the transformed economic system is not progressive are granted, it is, interestingly enough, Marx's approach that would exclude the changes achieved by Ethiopia from the realm of social revolution. This is so not because his requisite for revolutions (a change in the mode of production) is not met - since the nationalization of the means of production in Ethiopia is arguably such a change - but because he assumes that the changed mode of production is essentially more progressive than the one it replaces. In other words, he envisages capitalist relations of production to be more progressive than those that prevail under feudalism and socialist relations of production to be more progressive than those that prevail in capitalist societies. By this token, the transformation undergone by Ethiopia is as argued above, not progressive and, therefore, not a social revolution.

A contrary position can be arrived at based on Skocpol's and Trimberger's models which do not require progressiveness as a requisite for revolutions. Except for their positions on the need for the participation of the lower class or upper class in their revolutions, the models of those authors come near enough to embracing the Ethiopian episode within the scope of social revolutions. If, despite Marx, the Ethiopian experience is considered to be a revolution, it appears clear from the contemporary "revolutions" that are taking place in the east European states that Ethiopia is in desperate need of another revolution from above, below or an intermediate social group to undo some of what has already been done and much of what continues to be done.

However, we can say this only if we recognize that revolutions are or can be progressive i.e., if they can bring about change for the better.

#### FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER NINE

1. Chapter 5, pp. 191 ff, above; and Chapter 7, pp. 259-260, above.
2. Markakis, J. and Ne<sup>g</sup>ja Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia, Red Sea Press, New York, 1986, pp. 44, 47-48 and 52-54.
3. Halliday, F. and Molyneux, M., The Ethiopian Revolution, Verso Editions and NLB, London, 1981, p. 17.
4. Pages in Chapter 4 concerning the extent of assets nationalized.
5. See note 3 above, p. 20.
6. Clapham, C., Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 3-4 and Chapter 2.
7. Skocpol, T., States and Social Revolutions: a Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, p. 13.
8. See note 7 above, p. 292.
9. See note 7 above, pp. 14 ff.
10. See note 7 above, p. 31.
11. Hough, J.F., The Struggle for the Third World-Soviet Debates and American Options, The Brookings Institute, Washington, D.C., 1986, pp. 142 ff.
12. Two outstanding works on the role of peasants in radical politics are the following:  
Migdal, J., Peasants, Politics and Revolution: Pressures toward Political and Social Change in the Third World, Princeton University Press. 1974. Paige, J.M. Agrarian Revolution: Social Movements and Export Agriculture in the Underdeveloped World, Free Press, New York, 1975.
13. Chapter 1, pp. 39 ff, above.
14. Chapter 5 p. 176 above; and Chapter 7, p. 191, above.
15. Skocpol, T., "What Makes Peasants Revolutionary?" Comparative Politics, Vol. 14 No. 2, January 1982., pp. 351-375.

16. "The Communist Manifesto" reprinted in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, International Publishers, New York 1968, pp. 40-46, cited in Skocpol, note 7 above, pp. 7 and 8.
17. See note 11 above, pp. 156 ff.
18. See note 2 above.
19. See note 7 above, p. 4.
20. Trimberger, K.E., Revolution From Above, Military Bureaucrats and Development in Japan, Turkey, Egypt and Peru, Transaction Books, New Brunswick, 1978, pp. 2-3.
21. See note 3 above, pp. 25-31.
22. Tilly, C., From Mobilization to Revolution, Random House, New York, 1978, Chapter 7.
23. Levine, D.N., Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1965.
24. Moore, B., Injustice: the Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt, White Plains, New York, 1978, p. 469.
25. See note 6 above, pp. 13, 16 and 17.
26. Markakis, J., "Garrison Socialism in Ethiopia". MERIP Reports, No. 79, July, 1979.
27. See note 3 above, pp. 37 and 38.
28. See note 7 above, p. 4.
29. See note 20 above, pp. 105 and 106.
30. In fact, Marx's exposition of revolution is replete with the notion of how the emergence of a new mode of production gives rise to a new class which leads the revolution and liberates the new and more progressive economic order from the old socio-economic constraints. See for example: Marx, K. and Engels, F., The Communist Manifesto, Rustle, New York, 1963.
31. See note 6 above, pp. 16 and 17.
32. See note 7 above, p. 3.
33. Some reports, especially radio broadcasts, indicating western involvement in anti-Ethiopian government activities include the following. At the time of the Taiz conference

of 1976 held to co-ordinate the activities of the right wing movements of ELF, EDU and ALF, Saudi Arabia was authorised to transfer weapons to those movements. In the summer of 1977, the US made a promise of defensive weapons delivery to the republic of Somalia which signalled a dramatic shift away from its traditional client - Ethiopia. A movement which later emerged as an offshoot of EDU was the beneficiary of a modest amount of financial aid from the Reagan administration.

## APPENDIX A

### Chronology of Events

- 1908: The completion of the process of defining all present day Ethiopian territories except Eritrea through the conclusion of boundary treaties with Britain, France and Italy.
- 1922: Ethiopia's admission into membership of the league of nations.
- 1928: The establishment of the Royal Body Guard.
- 1930: The crowning of Haile Selassie I as King of Ethiopia.
- 1932: The establishment of the Holeta Military Academy
- 1936-41: The occupation of Ethiopia by Italy.
- 1941: The liberation of Ethiopia by the allied forces. Eritrea which had been under Italian colonial rule FOR 50 YEARS comes under British administration as enemy occupied territory.
- 1948: The return to Ethiopia of the Ogaden which had come under British administration from 1941.
- 1952: The federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia in accordance with a UN General Assembly Resolution. Economic and military agreements concluded between Ethiopia and the US.
- 1957: The establishment of the Harar Military Academy.
- 1958: The establishment of the Eritrean Liberation Movement.
- 1960: An abortive coup d'état against Haile Selassie by senior officers and the Royal Body Guard.  
The emergence of British and Italian Somalilands into independence as the Republic of Somalia.  
The establishment of WSLF in Mogadishu.
- 1962: The dissolution of Eritrea's federal status and its absorption into the unitary

1962: The dissolution of Eritrea's federal status and its absorption into the unitary state of Ethiopia.  
The formation of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions.

1965: The formation of the University Students' Union of Addis Ababa.

1968: The formation of an underground political organization abroad which later became AESM.

1970: The formation of EPLF.

1972: Formation of EPRP ABROAD.  
US starts demoting its military presence in Ethiopia.

1973: Successful Arab pressure on Ethiopia to cut diplomatic rations with Israel.

1974:

January: Mutiny of the 24th unit of the 4th Division in Negele and Dolo.

February 18: Strike and demonstration of taxi owners, teachers and students; often considered the beginning of the 1974 popular uprising.  
The first round of military uprising.  
The resignation of Aklilou's cabinet and Endalkachew's appointment as prime minister.

March: Appointment of Alem Zewd's Committee by Endalkachew. All the urban corporate groups start going on strikes and demonstrations.

April: The second round of military uprising and the arrest of Aklilou and members of his cabinet as well as many senior officers and civilian officials.  
Appointment of the National Security Commission by Gen. Abiy.

June 28: The official date for the establishment of the Derg.

July: The return to Ethiopia of EPRP leaders and the launching of their weekly paper (Democracia).  
The enhancement of the arrest of the old-state officials.

August: The launching of AESM's weekly paper (Voice of the Masses).  
The replacement as prime minister of Endalkachew by Michael Imiru.

September 12: Deposition of King Haile Selassie and suspension of the 1955 revised constitution.  
CELU calls for a general strike as an expression of its opposition to Derg rule.

November: Issuance of Proclamation of Development Through Campaign Programme.  
Summary execution of some 60 officials of the old-state, the chairman of the Derg (Aman Andom) and Derg members.

December 20: Adoption of the Ethiopian Socialism programme.

#### 1975

January: The nationalization of financial institutions.  
The beginning of the return to Ethiopia of AESM leaders.

February: The nationalization of financial institutions.  
The failure of EPRP and AESM leaders to come to an understanding.

March: The adoption of the Public Ownership of Rural Land Proclamation.  
Formal adoption by AESM to give the Derg "critical support".  
The beginning of sending Derg members and others to the socialist countries including Tanzania for political training.  
The formation of EDU abroad.

July: The nationalization of urban land and extra houses.

August: EPRP issues its programme and declares itself a party.

September: CELU calls for a general strike.

December: The adoption of a highly centralizing labour proclamation.  
The establishment of an AESM dominated committee in charge of politicising and organizing the masses.  
The beginning of the EPRP-AESM public campaign against one another in the papers.

**1976**

- April:** AESM declares its programme but falls short of calling itself a party.  
The adoption of the NDRPE.  
Formation of Pomoa.  
Mengistu invites all progressives to form a joint front against reactionary forces.
- May:** EPRP rejects Mengistu's invitation to form a joint front.  
The establishment of the Yekatit 1966 Political School.  
The Derg issues a nine-point peace policy concerning Eritrea.
- July:** Sisay and his associates are rounded up and executed allegedly for plotting to overthrow the Derg.  
The official withdrawal by the Derg of the Campaign Programme.  
Deterioration of relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan because of the former's alleged involvement in a coup against President El Numeri.
- August:** On the occasion of its general assembly meeting to hear the case against Sisay and his associates, the Derg appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Alemayehu to revise its constitution.  
EPRP decides to eliminate members of Mengistu's coalition.
- September:** Assassination breaks out between members of EPRP and Mengistu's coalition.  
EDU forms a coalition with ELF and ALF and goes into operation in the north-western province of Gondar from a base in the Sudan; it starts a propoganda campaign against the Derg with the help of Sudan's radio station.
- December:** The Alemayehu committee revised the constitution and bylaws of the Derg and stripped Mengistu of almost all his Derg functions.

**1977**

- February:** A palace coup in which those who had emerged victorious in the previous December reorganizations were rounded up and executed.  
Mengistu became the chairman of the Derg and the unchallenged leader of the

country.

The launching of the Red Terror campaign against EPRP.

Suspension of further aid by US to Ethiopia on the grounds of human rights violations.

- March: Visit of the Horn of Africa by Fidel Castro and Soviet Premier Podgorni to try and resolve the dispute between Ethiopia and Somalia.  
The formation of JFEMLOs.
- April: The closure of the Kagnew installation and a number of other US concerns by order of Mengistu.
- May 3: Mengistu visits Moscow and concludes an agreement for the shipment of Soviet arms to Ethiopia.  
The training of hundreds of thousands of militia is in full swing.
- July: Invasion of Ethiopia by the Republic of Somalia.  
AESM breaks with JFEMLO and the Derg goes underground.  
EDU forces are driven out of northern Ethiopia.
- November: Summary execution of the Derg's Vice-Chairman Atnafu Abate)  
The Republic of Somalia expels Soviet and Cuban advisers and diplomats out of the country.  
delivery of massive amounts of soviet weapons to Ethiopia.  
Arrival of Soviet military advisers and Cuban troops begins.
- December: EOPRS breaks with JFEMLO and the Derg.
- 1978**
- February: AEPRP is crushed after a year's resistance to the Red Terror.
- March: The forces of the Republic of Somalia are driven out of Ethiopia.
- May: Official condemnation of AESM BY JFEMLO AS THE RIGHT ROADER and its decision that the party must be established through the merger of its member organizations.
- June: The Derg's offensive against Eritrean secessionist fighters is stepped up.

The leadership of the Workers League is purged.

**1979**

**April:** JFEMLO decides that the party must be established through the "merger" of communist individuals around a centre to be established by representatives of the member organizations of JFEMLO.

**August:** Decision of the representatives of the military cadres that Mengistu should be the sole centre who will establish the party.

**1980**

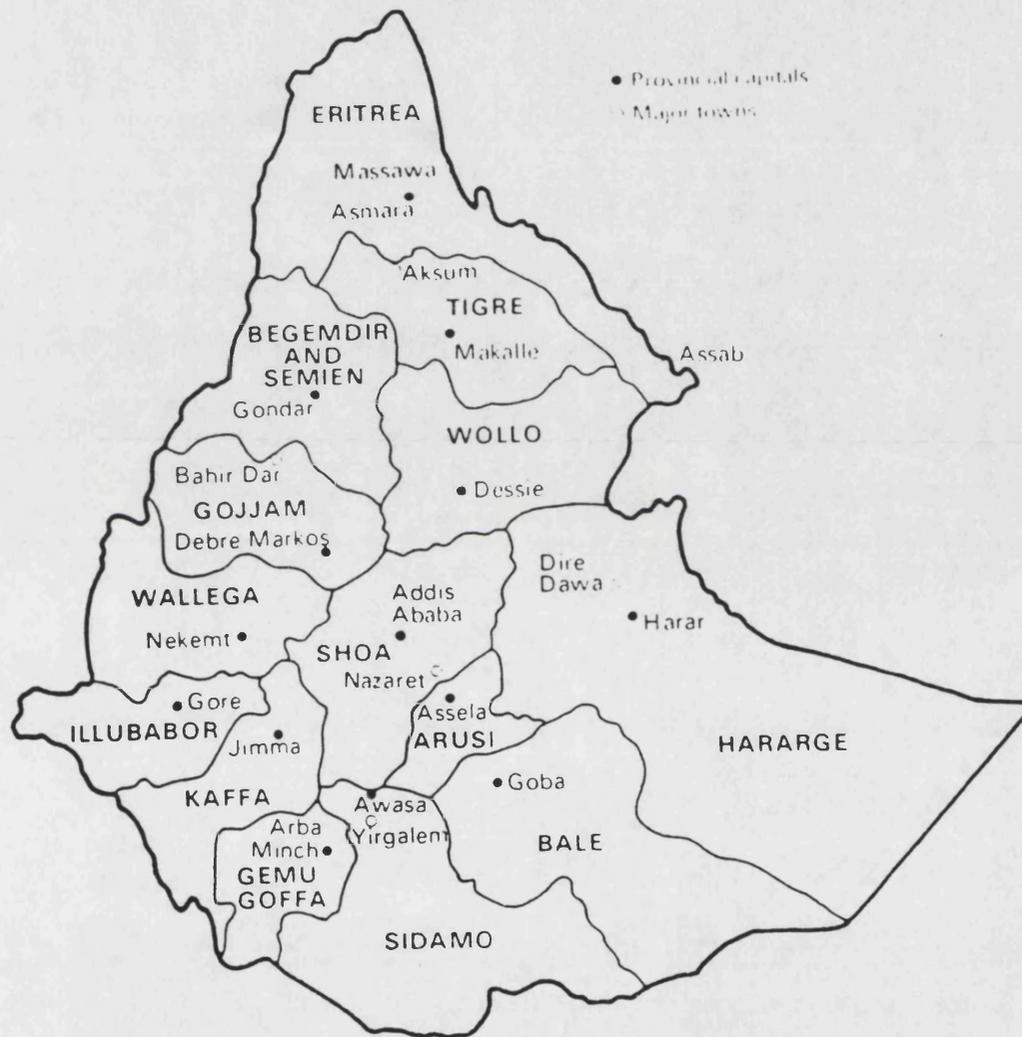
**January:** The establishment of COPWE.

**1984**

**September:** The establishment of WPE.

APPENDIX B





Administrative Divisions

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